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“TOO GOOD FOR HIM.”

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET
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“TOO GOOD FOR HIM.”

BY
FLORENCE MARRYAT,
(MRS. ROSS CHURCH,)
AUTHOR OF “LOVE’S CONFLICT.”

“A perfect woman, nobly plann’d,
To warn, to suffer, and command,
And yet a spirit still and bright,
With something of an angel light.”
WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty
1865.

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TO HIM

WHOSE LIFE IS ONE WITH MINE,

AND FOR WHOM EVERY EFFORT OF MY OWN IS MADE,

I Dedicate

(WITH FEELINGS TOO SACRED TO FIND PLACE UPON PAGES

THAT SHALL BE COMMON)

MY LABOUR OF THE SPRING.

MAY, 1865.

McLaughlin 25 Nov 1863

Gen. R. B. Ray 25 July 53 Pickering - 20

CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.



	CHAPTER I.	PAGE
REX REVERDON		1
	CHAPTER II.	
A FALL IN THE MARKET.		26
	CHAPTER III.	
BREAKERS AHEAD		50
	CHAPTER IV.	
THE DAY AFTER THE DERBY		76
	CHAPTER V.	
LOST TROUBLE		101
	CHAPTER VI.	
ISOBEL FANE		127
	CHAPTER VII.	
A MEETING IN COVENT GARDEN		153
	CHAPTER VIII.	
MR. AND MRS PEYTON AT HOME		181

CHAPTER IX.

	PAGE
THE LITTLE HOUSE AT ISLINGTON	205

CHAPTER X.

REX CONTINUES TO MAKE WAY	233
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

LUCY	264
----------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

ACCEPTED	304
--------------------	-----

“TOO GOOD FOR HIM.”

CHAPTER I.

REX REVERDON.

SOME years ago, some time about the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and twenty-four, there was living on his own estate of Blackleigh Thorpe Grange, in the county of Sussex, a gentleman of the name of Reverdon. His own estate it most decidedly was, for he had paid for it with his own money; but it had not descended to him from a long line of unblemished ancestry. Indeed, I am glad that it is not part of my task here to trace the Reverdon pedigree for you, for though doubtless Benjamin Reverdon had had some sort of a father, who had possessed himself of a similar commodity, yet I am afraid I should find it troublesome work to disinter their names,

callings, and occupations from the records of the past, since they did not care themselves to leave any for the satisfaction of their descendants. It is sufficient for my story that the Mr. Reverdon I write of was a gentleman—a gentleman to speak to, and a gentleman to look at, though he possessed no beauty.

With a figure rather under than over the middle height, and now carrying its fifty years with an assumption of corpulence, a large, good-humoured countenance, with regular, but insignificant features and scanty light hair, which had a decided tendency to red, his only redeeming grace was a pair of bright blue eyes, which were very mirthful occasionally, and occasionally very grave, but at all times looked thoroughly good and benevolent and true.

So appeared Mr. Benjamin Reverdon in the eyes of the natives of the hamlet of Blackleigh Thorpe, when he bought (to their great annoyance) “The Grange” estate, which had belonged to old Admiral Knyvett, and been in the possession of the Knyvetts for centuries past, from the

hands of his reckless nephew and heir, who was obliged to sell his birthright to keep himself out of the Queen's Bench. For Blackleigh Thorpe Grange to pass into the possession of a stranger was crime sufficient for the knowledge of the Blackleigh Thorpeians; but when it came to be known that the stranger was a bachelor, their indignation knew no bounds. A bachelor to preside at "The Grange," whose hospitalities far and wide had always been the eddying current which had alone prevented the stream of Blackleigh Thorpe society from becoming stagnant! Of the wealth of the new comer they had no cause to complain. Some estimate of it might be made from the splendid stud he brought with him to occupy "The Grange" stables,—from the retinue of servants, the costly furniture, the improvements on the estate which immediately followed his entrance upon his possession. And their estimate was not at fault. Mr. Reverdon was enormously rich. He had been a West Indian planter, and his coffee and sugar had not failed. From a young boy he had had his dwelling in that land where yellow fever and chronic dysentery hide

themselves in foggy airs, which feel refreshingly cool to the brow, and amongst rank vegetation, which looks refreshingly green to the eye, but over each of which the hot sun streams and draws out poison for those who are tempted to linger in such scenes.

It had been home to him, the only home he could remember, and England, his native land, was the stranger country. His plantations chiefly lay in Martinique and St. Domingo—fair enough to look upon both of them, and there he had lived and escaped all perils of death, and reached his half century with a tolerable allowance of health, and a more than tolerable allowance of money. He had formed no ties, no connexion there, and his parents had been long since dead ; so he threw up business in his own person, and confiding the care of his numerous plantations and mills to a trusty overseer, turned his thoughts and his steps towards England. It was all new to him, but a rich man does not long want friends ; there were plenty found willing and eager to assist the wealthy planter in his choice of a residence ; and

it was not long after it had been decided by Jack Knyvett's legal advisers that "The Grange" must positively go to the hammer, that Mr. Reverdon struck the right nail on the head, and secured it to himself. But there was no wife to do the honours of "The Grange." The master of the house was quite as alive to the evil of the vacant appointment as his circle of acquaintance was. He had come home with the full intention of marrying—but he had stayed first in London, and in the height of the season, and somehow it had changed his wishes in that direction. He had seen so much beauty there, so many pretty, innocent-looking girls, so many handsome, stately women, that ordinary mortals looked more than ordinary after them. For to his eyes—which for so many years had only encountered married specimens of the sex, most of them pulled down by sickness or the climate—these beauties of the Row, which to us are such familiar, everyday sights, appeared almost like creatures from another sphere, and he was simple enough—poor dear man!—to imagine that they were far beyond his reach. He was simple enough—not

having lived in the pale of London society, and had the privilege of occasionally peeping behind the scenes—to consider his fifty years on the one hand, and his general appearance on the other, as obstacles to his obtaining the hand of some fair, fresh young creature of eighteen in matrimony. He was sadly behind the world. The Belgravian correspondence had not been published then, you know, or he would have taken his fifteen thousand a year joyfully in one hand, and with the other pointed out which of the hours he desired to make his own. But he was so utterly ignorant and uninformed on these vital points, that he actually left town to settle at “The Grange,” without so much as trying to get an introduction to any one of them. If a thought of their various charms crossed his mind he would put it away with a sigh, to the remembrance of his own years and his unpolished exterior.

“I ought to have come home twenty years ago,” he would say to himself, “and then there might have been some chance for me. As it is, the sooner I go into the country the better.”

But here he found that single-handed his

attempts at hospitality failed. Mr. Reverdon might make himself as agreeable as he chose; he might give the most perfect dinners, subscribe munificently to the Sussex foxhounds, become a patron of every charity suggested to him, lay the contents of his hothouses and conservatories at the feet of every lady within a radius of ten miles, still, as long as "The Grange" was without a mistress, its doors were a closed mystery to the fairer portion of the community, and the fairer portion grumbled. All—perhaps excepting a few mammas who had daughters to dispose of, and who hoped the evil might be remedied at some future day—doing their best meanwhile to further it.

I don't think the Countess of Littlelin grumbled at the vacancy being yet unfilled, when she invited Mr. Reverdon to dinner day after day, when she could so ill afford it, and trotted out her daughters—Lady Maria, Lady Charlotte, and Lady Mary Hopeaway—for his approval. The Littlelin estates joined "The Grange"—there was only the park between them, and every square inch of that park was

mortgaged, as all the world knew ; for the Earl and Countess, not originally blest with too much money, had found their family growing up and their fortune going down at one and the same time, making a very neck-and-neck affair of the proceeding. With five sons out in the world, but not out as regarded their parents' pockets, and three unmarried daughters, who did not possess any decided advantages of beauty, it is not to be wondered at if poor Lady Littlelin did occasionally sigh as she glanced up “The Grange” carriage drive, and caught some glimpse of the luxury and comfort which everything belonging to that establishment denoted. For it had come to this with the Earl and Countess of Littlelin, that hospitality was almost a forgotten word between them, because the revenues of Barren Court barely served to pay their weekly bills and left no surplus for entertaining strangers. But her Ladyship argued, and justly, that it does sometimes pay to lay a small fish as bait for a larger one, and on that principle she acted,—and succeeded. For though Mr. Reverdon had been rather put off the

scent of matrimony by the sight of those (as he thought) unobtainable beauties which he had seen in London, he was not blind to the fact that the only thing he wanted was a wife; he was not blind either to the fact that the mixture of a little blue blood would do no harm to his own—and the blood of the Hopeaways was unmistakeably blue. So he put that other thought away from him resolutely, like a brave man as he was, and waited to see what the present had for him. Here were three scions of aristocracy, not unrelated to Royalty itself, and none of them past child-bearing, if not exactly offered to him, at least silently paraded for his inspection and approval. So he took courage and made his choice. Here he showed that he was not devoid of taste, for he selected the best-looking of the three, Lady Charlotte; and, after a due and decent amount of courtship, asked her hand in marriage, which offer was immediately accepted on the part of the Earl and Countess. Now the tide of popularity turned in favour of Mr. Benjamin Reverdon. If the Earl and

Countess of Littlelin could give him their daughter, what ought the Blackleigh Thorpeians not to do in the shape of kow-tooing before the newly-married pair? And, accordingly, Lady Charlotte and Mr. Reverdon were the reigning idols of the surrounding county for some months after their nuptials.

All this time I have scarcely mentioned the bride. If her heart was in her marriage I cannot tell you; succeeding events seemed to say, No. There had been talk of another suitor some time before that,—a younger, handsomer man, with the same disadvantage of being a commoner, and the extra disadvantage of possessing very little money. The lectures of the Countess of Littlelin to her daughter on that occasion had been beautiful to listen to. To hear her speak you would have imagined her some noble creature, who would not have hesitated to sacrifice every personal feeling for the better upholding of the exalted station she occupied—and all that constituted her own happiness, for the good of the name she bore. A Hopeaway to marry a commoner!

A Hopeaway to forget her rank ! A Hopeaway to bring a blemish into the family pedigree—a blemish for which she would be disgraced to generations unborn ! The Countess' bursts of enthusiastic indignation were sublime ; poor Lady Charlotte listened and obeyed, and the handsome young commoner, with thick muddy blood in his veins (thick and muddy at least compared to the cobalt washings which did duty for blood in the Littlekins), was sent away to make a fortune if he could, and to forget his misfortune as he might. But people said that Lady Charlotte had looked thinner since that time, and talked less. She was not a talkative person, I should imagine, at any time ; years after the period of which I am speaking, when she had passed her *première jeunesse*, she was a hard-featured, silent woman. But she was always aristocratic-looking. At the time she married Mr. Reverdon she was eight-and-twenty ; a tall, slight, angular woman, with dark eyes and hair, and a high nose, a pale complexion, and a reserved, haughty disposition. She did not enter her new home with many ideas of

being happy there. I do not think they either of them expected that. The marriage had been a very satisfactory bargain; the settlements on the part of the bridegroom magnificent; the trousseau, the only possession brought by the bride, pronounced perfect. Lady Charlotte Hopeaway had got a husband, and Mr. Reverdon had got a mistress for Blackleigh Thorpe Grange—*voilà tout*; and what could you want more?

A couple of years went by—years, I expect, very empty of enjoyment to either party, though the renewed hospitalities of “The Grange” had given entire satisfaction to the surrounding county families; and then a new actor came upon the stage—a gentleman long looked for and much coveted by Mr. Reverdon—no less a personage than my hero himself, his son and heir. It is a general supposition that when married people do not care much for one another, the birth of a baby has a very good effect in uniting the parents’ hearts more closely together. It ought to do so, but I do not believe it does. I have oftener seen the child of

such parents become a bone of contention between them, and the cause of greater estrangement than otherwise. It was so with the son of Lady Charlotte and Mr. Reverdon. The father received the infant with such unmitigated delight that the mother avoided all rhapsodies on the subject. Mr. Reverdon, as years went on, made such a point of spoiling him in his indulgent love, that Lady Charlotte adopted the opposite plan of opposing the child's most innocent desires. He had been baptized by the high-sounding names of Reginald Hopeaway Reverdon, after his august grandfather, and amongst his sponsors he could boast of two with handles to their names; but because Lady Charlotte liked to mouth the long names, as if they were the best part of the child and the only part which belonged to herself, her husband took delight in curtailing them to simple "Rex," and as "Rex" my hero was always known. At this period of his life, that is to say when he was about seven years old, he was a very nice-looking little boy, tall for his age and very fair, with his father's bright blue eyes and

his father's red hair, considerably deepened by a mixture of the darker shade of his mother's. But he was a freckled child—as fair skin and red hair will freckle—and his mother said he was very plain, and all the more so because he was like his father, and used to grow quite angry when strangers praised his personal appearance and said he gave promise of great beauty.

As if a son of Benjamin Reverdon could ever be handsome, even with all the advantage which a dash of Littlelin blood could give him! So she thought, if she did not say. In the meanwhile the father and son were all in all to one another. Whether Mr. Reverdon had any presentiment, at this time, that he should not be spared to see his son grow up—whether any symptoms of the disease which killed him had shown themselves beforehand and warned him of the probable issue, I know not, but he could not bear to part with Rex in order that he might go to school, and had a tutor at home for him instead. Then when lesson time was over, and Lady Charlotte had gone out driving in stately misery by herself, or was sitting in her

drawing-room in starched silence, brooding over Heaven knows what, Mr. Reverdon would take his way to the open country on horseback, his little son on a pony by his side, or he would walk in the woods or surrounding fields, with Rex's hand fast clinging to his own.

The last few years had aged Mr. Reverdon very much; he said it was the English climate; I believe it was Lady Charlotte, and Rex was the only thing that had kept him alive till then. But even Rex failed at last. When he was nearly eight years old, his father died; not suddenly, but by a lingering illness which crept about him, little by little, till the flame of life was quite exhausted and flickered out. I do not know what was its exact nature. The doctors called it a general breaking-up of the system, brought on prematurely by a long residence in the West Indies; but my own opinion I have told you before.

Whatever it was, it had the power to kill him; and one soft summer's evening when the air was still alive with insect life, and heavy with the exhaled perfume of rifled flowers, with his arms around Rex, his cheek pressed close

to the fair young face of his child, the soul of Benjamin Reverdon passed quietly to its account.

Peace to his ashes! we shall not look upon a better man in these pages again. Not even the fact of her husband dying could rouse Lady Charlotte from her apathy; she did what was required of her, but she did no more. Her mourning was as deep as if she had lost her life's happiness with him, and the Blackleigh Thorpeians said that “dear Lady Charlotte looked the very picture of what a widow ought to be;” but I do not find that she loved the dead man's son any the better that he was left solely dependent upon her for love. Indeed she became more indifferent to him than less. He stood between her—this commoner's son—and a great deal of wealth. Mr. Reverdon had been a business man all his life. His will was properly drawn up and witnessed. Proper guardians were appointed to see after his son's interests, for Mr. Reverdon had not lived in England for ten years without making influential friends, and the bulk of the property was to descend to Rex. I have said before what this

property was. The will bequeathed the estate of "The Grange," with an income of ten thousand a year, to the son, whilst the remaining five thousand made a handsome residue for the widow, and was left to her unconditionally, and for her sole use and benefit. Nothing therefore could be more satisfactory, as far as money was concerned. Every one thought the widow would continue to reside on the estate, superintending the education of her son, and looking after his interests at the same time, but every one was mistaken. When she mentioned to Mr. Miller, one of Rex's guardians, her intention of sending him to school at once, and that gentleman commenced a remonstrance, Lady Charlotte soon stopped him :—

"When I have decided upon a thing, my dear sir, I am accustomed to see it carried out. Reginald is, I am sorry to say, not a boy who could advantageously be brought up at home under a mother's eye; he has much in him that I should wish to see uprooted. He has been a great deal spoiled by the late Mr. Reverdon. I

am quite determined that a public school is the best place for him.”

She gained her way, and I have no doubt it was the best thing for him after all. If his father had lived he would have made a milk-sop of the boy ; had his mother kept him under her sway, she would have broken his spirit with unkindness and want of sympathy. As it was, Eton did neither one nor the other, but turned him out a man and a gentleman.

In the meanwhile Lady Charlotte Reverdon let “The Grange,” with the consent of her son’s guardians, and almost immediately went abroad, where she remained for more than a year. When the period for Rex’s first holidays arrived, his guardians, Mr. Miller and Colonel Clementon, received a communication from Lady Charlotte requesting them to allow him to spend the vacation at either of their houses, or failing that, to place him with some family who would look after him—circumstances, she affirmed, detaining her abroad. Circumstances indeed continued to detain her there, until rumours reached England that, in some way or other, she had managed to

come to terms with her old suitor Mr. Huntley, who had long filled the place of attaché to the British Embassy in Paris, and was about to return home as his wife. And rumour for once spoke the truth. Mr. Huntley, either from a re-illumination of his ancient flame or a more modern peep into her ladyship's money-bags, had really consented to withdraw his valuable services from the disposal of Government, and to live, for the remainder of his life, upon five thousand a year. Consequently a very short time, comparatively speaking, after poor Mr. Reverdon's death saw the Huntleys settled in a beautiful house at Wimbledon, where they enjoyed the pleasures of both town and country at almost one and the same time. This was about the year 1835.

When Lady Charlotte Huntley was again settled in England, it was at least thought that she would take the trouble of having her son, Rex Reverdon, home for his occasional holidays, but this she carefully eluded. At first her nerves would not bear the noise and commotion which usually attended that young gentleman's presence; then, as one child after another appeared

to swell the Huntley quiver, various excuses appeared with them to cut poor Rex out of his summer and winter fun ; and finally, when she seemed to have completed her family, the example of her eldest son was really such as she most dreaded for his brother and sisters. Six of them there were in all—first a son and then five daughters in succession—and notwithstanding all their mother’s injunctions to them not to copy their brother Rex in this, that, or the other, the wild, joyous, warm-hearted eldest scion of the house managed to usurp a large portion of the affection of the younger members of his family, even during the few and hurried visits that he was permitted to make to the establishment at Wimbledon.

But Rex was very happy during those boyish days, notwithstanding that from his mother’s house he was almost exiled. His holidays were spent alternately at the residences of Mr. Miller and Colonel Clementon, with both of whom he was a great favourite. Indeed I doubt if at this time there was any one, except his own mother, with whom he was not a favourite, for

as a boy he was perfect, and gave promise of becoming everything that is bravest, and most generous, and best in manhood. Colonel Clementon was a bachelor living in London; and perhaps the visits Rex made to him every Christmas vacation were those least calculated to do him good. In such a *ménage*, he necessarily saw, heard, and was mixed up with, much that he had best not seen or heard at that tender age. For the Colonel was a thorough man of the world, and could not always keep the lambswool clothing which he strove hard to wear in the presence of his young charge, decently over his wolfish old shoulders. We must give him the credit however of having done his best towards it. If Rex learnt more in Spanish Place, Portman Square, at this period, than he ought to have done, it was chiefly from contact with the Colonel's friends, rather than the Colonel himself—men about town of his own stamp who were charmed with the boyish frankness and warm-hearted enthusiasm of young Rex Reverdon, and put their decided veto against anything like his exclusion from their bachelor dinners or his

being ordered to bed at the proper time for his youth and innocence. But Mr. Miller's family was where he ought to have been placed for both summer and winter. The boy enjoyed his visits there far more than he did to Spanish Place, notwithstanding that childish curiosity, and that innate desire which is born with all of us to know more than is right we should know, made his days in the latter place one long series of false excitement. But Mr. Miller's house in Hove, Sussex — Hove, which used to be so charmingly rural, retired, and peaceful in those days, but which now is built over with modern terraces, and squares, and crescents, after Brighton's own fashion, until it is a part of London-by-the-sea itself; could there be a more delightful place for a boy home for the holidays, to spend his time in? And could there be a more delightful family than Mr. Miller's to do the honours to a schoolboy? with the fresh good-humoured, motherly mistress of the establishment, who did not mind how much dirt was made, and always understood exactly how the lads had been detained beyond the dinner-hour,

or the ringing of the tea-bell; with all the young Millers for companions, eight of them in number, and two Eton men themselves, with whom Rex had cricketed, and boated, and played hockey until they had become as brothers to him.

Rex used to think in those days, and justly, that in all England there were few houses to compare in comfort to Osborne House, Hove, and few people to compare in kindness with his guardian's family. For they had come to look upon Rex as almost one of themselves. Lady Charlotte's evident indifference to him made the warm-hearted Mrs. Miller only open her arms the more to receive the orphaned boy to her motherly embrace. But Mr. Miller and Colonel Clementon alike felt their charge to be a very onerous one. A youth, heir to ten thousand a year, and an estate like "The Grange," is a difficult bark to steer safely through the waves of this troublesome world, beneath which lie so many dangerous shoals and such uncertain anchorage. Rex's allowance, made to him in those Eton days, was more than ample: it was noble. His

guardians felt that, with such prospects, it ought to be so, and that with the probability of having so large an income to direct and manage, the boy would do well to learn early the value of money. But Rex was not in this instance an apt pupil. Mr. Miller might talk about extravagance and keeping accounts; Colonel Clementon might warn against debt and embarrassments; but neither one nor the other could prevent Rex Reverdon from throwing his money about like a king, and getting a name at Eton for being the most generous, liberal, careless, and "jolliest" fellow going. In his little world there he reigned paramount. There were better scholars, doubtless, upon the books during those years, better boys, more careful, more diligent and steady, perhaps more gentlemanly; but I defy the annals not only of Eton, but of any other public school in the United Kingdom to produce then or at any time a braver, more generous-hearted, or more honest lad than this same Rex Reverdon at fifteen years old. His love for mischief, for daring scrapes, his manly character, and his ample funds, made him

the popular idol in his school, as he was afterwards in his College. But with all this promise of future good, there was a recklessness—a “devil-may-care” feeling (if you will allow me the term)—which would have made a mother (had Rex possessed a mother who watched over his interests) tremble when she thought of his years to come. He was rich, careless, and removed from the influence of home affections—sorry passports with which to go through this world. He could scarcely have commenced his journey under more unfavourable circumstances.

CHAPTER II.

A FALL IN THE MARKET.

FOR some years previous to this time (indeed, ever since the passing of the Abolition Act) doubts and fears (warnings of that great earthquake which eventually shook the money market to its very centre, and was the ruin of so many British families) had already possessed the minds of those who owned West Indian property, and made them tremble for its safety. Indeed, I may go farther than this, and say that shocks had already been felt in many parts of the West India Islands, and heavy losses been incurred; but all did not suffer at the same time, and those whose property still yielded its annual profits, were sanguine in believing that the evil could not spread,—and the fluctuating nature of the disease seemed at first to carry out their asser-

tions. Amongst those who did not believe in coming ruin were the guardians of young Rex Reverdon. Mr. Reverdon, in choosing Colonel Clementon and Mr. Miller to be the trustees for his son's money, had been actuated, perhaps, more by the friendship they displayed for himself than by his personal knowledge of their aptitude for business. But at that time there was no reason to suspect that any great interference would be needed on their parts. Mr. Reverdon had hoped that as soon as Rex was of an age to understand business, he would visit his property periodically himself, and see after his own interests. In the meanwhile it was under the charge of, as he believed, a most trustworthy man; and all that the guardians of his son would have to do would be to receive the yearly revenues, and see that they were properly placed out to interest, or expended for Rex's use. Colonel Clementon, indeed, on his being offered the trust, had urged upon Mr. Reverdon his unfitness for such an office. "I never could keep my own accounts right, Reverdon," he had said on that occasion, "so I don't know how I

am to manage Rex's. Why, I'm not quite certain I could say my multiplication-table now.”

Mr. Reverdon had laughed at the old gentleman's warning as a joke, and passed it off as such.

“If you will give Rex the benefit of your experience, my dear Colonel, and knowledge of the world, that is all I ask of you,” was his reply. “I hope his fortune will not prove troublesome to any one.”

And the Colonel did give Rex a very good benefit of his knowledge of the world, as you have already seen ; and Rex was a very apt pupil, as you will see hereafter. And that was really all that the Colonel had done ; he had taken his friend completely at his word, and was a sleeping partner in the business, whilst Mr. Miller did all the work. This last gentleman had certainly had his fears. Once he had rushed up to town very unexpectedly to consult Colonel Clementon, upsetting that old gentleman's equilibrium for several days after, by his sudden appearance and confused stories of the funds falling, and a prospect of total ruin for their ward. But the

rumour examined proved to be exaggeration, and then the Colonel persuaded Mr. Miller to take no hasty steps in the matter.

“St. Domingo and Martinique are safe enough,” he said. “If there had been anything wrong, the overseer Matthews would have written you word, it would be folly to attempt to sell now with the funds so low. Remember what Reverdon said with his last breath, ‘Whatever you do, don’t sell out the boy’s property without mature deliberation.’ Reverdon was a man who knew what he was about; he was acquainted with the nature of West Indian property better than we are, and felt how the money must suffer by transfer. Depend upon it, the best thing you can do, Miller, is to go by his advice.”

“Perhaps so,” answered Mr. Miller; “but Reverdon couldn’t have foreseen this. The land is going down every day. Barbadoes and Guadeloupe are not worth a shilling in the pound. What will become of Rex’s fortune in that case?”

“Rex’s fortune is not in Barbadoes or Guadeloupe,” was the Colonel’s answer; “his islands

are safe enough. I should go entirely by Matthews' advice. Miller! You'll make a mess of it if you interfere.”

And so Mr. Miller, sorely against his will, had acted upon his brother trustee's counsel. The selling out then would have been attended with enormous loss. Perhaps he would be scarcely justified in doing it with another person's money. Perhaps he had better wait; yet he waited with an anxious heart.

Lady Charlotte Huntley, whose jointure was also in West Indian property, had sold out her money almost immediately upon her second marriage. It had decreased, of course, in consequence, but it was safe. Mr. Miller sometimes thought of its safety with a sigh of envy. I do not know who advised her to the step. Perhaps her father, the noble Earl, who had known the want of money long enough to make him very sharp wherever it was concerned; perhaps her husband, Mr. Huntley, who, having given up his appointment as attaché, might not have considered her Ladyship's charms sufficiently valuable to balance an uncertain revenue.

Any way, her's was safe and Rex's was not. But Rex was too young at this time to know much about it, or to care if he knew.

From Eton he went to Oxford, at his own desire. He was not to be brought up to any profession, also at his own desire.

“Profession, only another word for slavery,” as he said in the pride of his youth and strength, and certain prospect of freedom from any such necessity. “But as for education, Mr. Miller,” he had added, “that’s quite another thing; one can’t have too much of that, and I don’t call a man a man who hasn’t passed through College.”

And so Rex, at eighteen, went to obtain his certificate of manhood at Christ Church College. Here he became as great a favourite as at Eton. What young fellow would not, who had plenty of money to please himself and others, and when pleased, an inexhaustible stock of good humour? If the education he coveted consisted in boating, cricketing, shooting, and hunting, certainly Rex did not appear as if he thought one *could* have too much of it. If he was not the best oarsman,

bowler, and shot there, it was not for want of practice on his part. In these branches of his studies he was indefatigable. But I do not know whether I can say as much for the others. He certainly did not take a first—on the conclusion of his term at Oxford, nor a second, nor a third, that I am aware of. You could not have looked in his face, and suspected him of any such thing. Frank, open, and joyous as it was, with a very fair amount of brains shown in his fine forehead and intelligent gaze, there was yet too much restless mirth in his eyes, and want of application about his open mouth, to make anyone set him down as a man who was fond of his books.

He stayed at Oxford for nearly three years ; at that time, having attained his majority, and entered upon his fortune, he came up to London to “let out,” as he himself expressed it. And now is the most favourable opportunity for me to describe him to you, since he has altered little from that to the present time.

Rex Reverdon, at one-and-twenty, had fulfilled the prophecies of beauty which had given

his mother such offence in his childhood. His hair was dark auburn—his friends said that he combed it with metallic combs, and brushed it with galvanic brushes, and used fabulous numbers of bottles of hair-oil per annum to keep it down to that colour, and that if he left it alone it would have been plain red. I do not believe it myself, for conceit of his personal appearance was the last fault Rex Reverdon could be accused of. However, I would not answer, in these or any days, for the truth of the charms of my nearest friend; so that must pass. To the public at all events his hair was auburn, and with it he possessed, at this early age, small moustaches and whiskers of a very fair hue—which, in after years, ripened into a golden beard, shaded with brown, which was a glory to him. Blue eyes, with a wicked expression in them, a frank English nose of no particular denomination, and a set of large, white teeth, well displayed from beneath a short curled upper lip. Lots of decision—indeed, I may as well say at once, lots of obstinacy—about his mouth and chin; and a large, well-knit, muscular figure, standing

about six foot one, which looked as if it would not require much aid in defending itself or others against assault and battery.

Such was Rex Reverdon in personal appearance when he came of age. In character, he was hot-headed, passionate, and obstinate; but honourable, generous, and good-humoured withal,—that is to say, when he had nothing to make him otherwise. Do you think you should have liked him? I am aware, since he had but one face, that he cannot please you all; but where he fails to do so, put the blame to my description of him; for he was really very loveable and very good to look upon. What Mr. Rex called “letting out” was furnishing a house with reckless splendour in town, whilst he kept up a similar establishment in the country for his occasional relaxation (as he called it). Not the poor old Grange,—that was too far behind the world for glorious Rex. What! bury himself down in Sussex? “No, Mr. Miller,” he had said; “let the old place again, or sell it, or let it stand empty. My ‘box’ must be near Oxford.” So his “box,” which proved a very

good-sized receptacle indeed, and could have nearly accommodated the whole of the men from Christ Church College at once, was fitted up for his use and benefit where he chose it to be, and "The Grange" knew him no more.

He had plenty of money, why shouldn't he do what he chose with his own? Ten thousand a year is a large income for a young bachelor's use, and prodigal as the generality of them can be, it is not easily spent.

Lady Charlotte Huntley viewed her son's establishments, and heard of his studs and entertainments, with the greatest envy. It had rankled in her breast, ever since her first husband's death, that the boy had not been left more dependent upon herself. It was this feeling which had made her resign all care of his education or himself during his boyhood, as if she would say that not having all, she would have none. Now that his property had passed into his own hands, and she compared his wealth with the prospects of her other children, she almost hated him for his good fortune, and barely received him with civility when he paid his visits to the house at Wimbledon.

They were seldom paid, too, and would have been still seldomer but for the existence of his half-brother, Gabriel Huntley, between whom and Rex Reverdon there had always existed (notwithstanding the ten years' difference in their ages) a great attachment.

Gabriel almost worshipped Rex as his type of all that was most perfect in man, and Gabriel was the only creature for whom Rex had ever experienced any feeling approaching to love. And the more the brothers appeared to care for one another, the more was Lady Charlotte Huntley jealous of their mutual affection, and desirous of preventing their meeting.

I must not tell you too much of Rex's life at this period. I am afraid those establishments of his would not have borne looking into at all times. He was very young, and the Colonel and his friends had given him a great many lessons,—though, perhaps, unintentionally,—and he was rich, and surrounded by temptations. What wonder if he thought the world was made for him, and everything in it? The old Colonel himself had ventured to remonstrate with his

light-hearted ward as to whether he was not "letting out" a little too much, but he was assailed with so many return shafts for his pains—so many old stories that he did not know the boy had ever heard, or, having heard, remembered—that he was fairly beaten off the field, and compelled to confess that he was not the one to play Mentor. Mr. Miller had broached the subject with less timidity, though equal kindness; but one glance at Rex's face had warned him that he had best leave the matter alone.

The look which accompanied his answer was as black as thunder: "I am my own master, Mr. Miller," he had said; "I am obliged to no one who questions my actions." But his friend keeping silence, the cloud had passed as rapidly as it came, and Rex's hand stolen into his. "Forgive my heat, Miller," were the frank words; "I'm a sad naughty boy, I know, but I can't stand lecturing." And so the question had been passed over.

You may suppose that Mr. Miller had not permitted Rex to reach this age, and to enter upon his property, without having communicated

to him some of the suspicions which had occurred to himself on the advisability of taking some measures to secure at least part of his fortune by transferring it to English consols. But Rex was utterly ignorant of business, and the fear appeared to him unfounded. He did not like the idea of parting with any of his income—he did not find it at all too much; there were certain drains upon him from those two establishments which seemed never-ceasing, and would have swallowed up twenty thousand a year, instead of ten, if he had had it. And like most young men who are very ignorant about business matters, he imagined he knew a great deal, and talked about the value of land, and the depreciation of property, and the rise and fall of the money-market, as if he had lived half his life in the West Indies and the other half on Change. Mr. Miller had spoken more than once, but in vain. When Rex entered upon his property, it was safe enough. The advice of the overseer left in charge was all against transfer. There was a panic in the market at present, but it would all blow over; no difficulty had been experienced

as yet in procuring labour, &c. And Rex determined to go by the overseer's advice.

"I have done what I thought my duty, Rex," said Mr. Miller to him one day, while speaking on the subject; "but perhaps it is as well you should follow your own wishes. If it should prove after all that my fears are groundless, you might have blamed me for the decrease in your fortune."

And so foolish Rex went on in his spendthrift course, throwing away his money right and left, and not always on the most deserving objects, and living even beyond the handsome income which his poor father had amassed for him after so many years' toil. And then dawned eighteen hundred and forty-eight, in which year Rex Reverdon completed his twenty-second birthday, and lost his fortune. For it was at that time that St. Domingo and Martinique, who had held out hitherto, though occasionally threatened with dissolution, laid down their arms, as that monied earthquake reached even them, and overwhelmed them with the shock. The first intelligence was communicated by letter to Rex himself from the

overseer Matthews. There had been insurrections amongst the plantation workers; whole crops had been burnt down, labour was unprocurable. The money was beginning to fail in coming in. At the first intimation that he received of the loss, Rex rushed to his friend Mr. Miller, eager for his advice when it was too late to make it of any use. His friend's counsel was, “Sell out at once;” but on inquiry that was found to be impossible, or next to useless. Martinique and St. Domingo were not worth (what Mr. Miller had said years before of other islands) a shilling in the pound.

“Rex, there is only one thing to be done,” said Mr. Miller. “You must go over there and see after your property yourself. No time is to be lost. I will go with you if you wish it. We ought to have done so before.”

“Is it really necessary, do you think?” inquired Rex, with an air of indifference.

“Lord bless my soul!” exclaimed Mr. Miller. “Why, you talk as if losing ten thousand a year was an everyday occurrence. Necessary! of course it is, if you wish to have

anything to live upon. We must start by the next steamer."

"Oh, certainly," rejoined Rex. "I shall enjoy the trip."

He could not realize that he should suffer severely by this depreciation of property. He thought of land in the Indies as we think of land in England—as sterling possession. He was certainly not a man of business. Little more than a fortnight afterwards he found himself standing upon this land he thought so much of in company with Mr. Miller. This latter gentleman had been in very low spirits all the passage over; he could not help wondering if poor Benjamin Reverdon could still be aware of what took place in this world, and was blaming him for breach of trust in not doing what he had felt all along would be the safest thing to do, instead of suffering himself to be led wrong by others less practical than he was. But the chief one concerned in the misfortune was as lively as was his wont the whole time, and did not seem (if he contemplated) in the least to care for the impending blow.

On their arrival at St. Domingo, where the principal property lay, they found matters worse than even Mr. Miller had anticipated. It seemed that this was but the crisis of what had been coming on slowly for years, and that in consequence of there having been no one to see after the interests of the owner of the plantations, the overseer had knowingly kept them in ignorance of what he must have foreseen, sooner than lose his situation. He had proved as trustworthy as many another whom we trust and swear by, and had simply ruined the master in whose service he had made his own fortune. I will not weary you here by details. A very rapid glance into accounts and survey of the various plantations, added to the advice of men on the spot who had been friends with Mr. Reverdon, and were eager to assist his son, convinced not only Mr. Miller, but the careless owner himself, that, although it was not utter ruin, it was no longer ten thousand a year. A rough calculation brought Mr. Miller to the conclusion that fifteen hundred might perhaps be saved out of the wreck of the property, which

the sale of "The Grange," since Rex would not live there, might swell to two thousand—rather a "come down" for a man who has been worth five times that sum; but the news, though it damped Rex's spirits for a few days, did not carry its influence much farther. He was too lighthearted for that; he rose from beneath trouble like a cork in water, and in a week's time was ready to make the best of it.

"After all, you know," he observed to Mr. Miller, "two thousand a year is a very good income for a fellow like me. I never mean to marry. If I can only keep a horse under me and my head above water, I shall want nothing more. It's awful bad luck, but it can't be helped. I bet I'm as happy with two thousand as with ten."

"Of course you will be if you take it in that spirit, my dear boy," answered Mr. Miller, "and I'm only too delighted to hear you talk so. I think you are very wise too to determine now to sell out your property. Let what you have be safe. The rascality of that man Matthews is beyond belief. I'm afraid you

would be hardly willing to make constant trips over here to see after your overseer, and therefore the best thing you can do is to have done with West Indian property for ever. Your two thousand a year is sufficient to give you every luxury; a far larger income than most people possess, if you can only forget you ever possessed a larger one."

This conversation took place on board the 'Glendower' steam-packet as they were returning to England after their fruitless voyage. It was late in the year, and the stormy state of the weather at sea was a great contrast to the smiling scenes they had just left behind them in the West India Islands. Rex and Mr. Miller were both good sailors, and cared nothing for a puff of wind. It was very cold, and a strong breeze was blowing; but wrapped in great coats and carriage rugs, their travelling caps well secured over their faces, and their cigars between their lips, they paced the tiny deck of the 'Glendower,' or reclined in the luxurious chairs they had provided for themselves, with as much comfort as if they were at home. As they walked and

talked, Rex's attention was directed several times to the shabby figure of a man huddled up against the gangway, who seemed very inadequately clothed, and shivering with the cold. He was a little, seedy-looking man, with an assumption of the military about him, as was borne out by a thin moustache, and a well-worn military cloak. If one might have judged from his boots, the suit beneath the military cloak would scarcely have borne inspection. Rex was a warm-hearted young fellow; he could not bear to feel his own, more than sufficient, clothing about him, and to see his woollen rug, the thickness of two blankets, lying unused upon the skylight whilst a fellow-creature shivered. He wished to offer it to the stranger more than once, but hesitated from shyness; but at last, as he caught for the fiftieth time a glance of the little fishy-green eyes weeping from the cold, and marked the tremble in the wretched little legs, he stopped almost involuntarily, saying—

“It's deuced cold up here, isn't it? I see you've left your rug down below; pray use mine,” tossing it to him as he spoke.

The seedy man did not appear at all overpowered by the attention; he accepted the offer of the horse-rug with a great many thanks, but immediately became familiar on the strength of it; and instead of sitting still under the burden of his honour, he wrapt the thick material in majestic folds about his person, and commenced walking up and down the deck, by the side of Mr. Miller and Rex Reverdon, whilst he entered into conversation with him. Mr. Miller, who had a great dislike to anything like undue familiarity from strangers, showed it at once, by ensconcing himself under the shadow of a newspaper in the depths of his own armchair; but Rex, who would not have had the courage thus to disburden himself of an unpleasant companion at any time, continued to pace up and down the deck in the company which he had thus unexpectedly drawn upon himself by his politeness.

“You find the weather cold, Sir?” was the first remark the little man made with an upward glance at Rex’s face.

Rex was amused at the question coming from

so scantily clad a traveller, and answered in the affirmative.

“I should think any one would,” he added; “why this wind’s enough to cut one in two—particularly after the islands.”

“You have been to the islands, Sir?”

“Yes; St. Domingo and Martinique.”

“On business?” asked the seedy man.

Rex thought the question rather impertinent, coming from a stranger, but he answered it, though shortly.

“Yes.”

His companion observed his tone, for he immediately apologized.

“In asking such a question, Sir, I merely meant to lead to the inquiry, if you belong to her Majesty’s army, or not? I thought, perhaps, from the moustache——”

“No,” answered Rex, “I do not; I belong to no profession.”

“Indeed, Sir. Well, you are happy to be able to do so. I belong to the army, as you may have perceived by my appearance. Her Majesty’s army is not what it was, Sir; true

worth and bravery are too often placed into the background, whilst places of influence and power are given to any tyrant who may possess the interest to procure them. Her Majesty's army, Sir, is no longer a free service, it——”

Rex had so often been placed in the predicament of hearing the grumblings of old military and naval officers, who blamed the service they belonged to for their own want of interest, that the news was stale to him, and he tried to cut it short by saying—

“What regiment do you belong to?”

“*Do*, Sir? *Did*, you mean. I did belong to H.M. 150th regiment of the line, stationed at Bermuda, but I have left it, as I would leave any corps where tyranny usurped the place of a free and impartial justice.”

“Left it! Have you resigned the service?”

“No, Sir, I trust not. I hope at no distant day again to number myself amongst the servants of Her Majesty.”

He did not think it worth while to make it plainer, at that time, that having conducted the band of H.M. 150th regiment,

he had been dismissed from his situation for drunkenness.

“Oh ah!” thought Rex, “sold out, I suppose, poor beggar;” and then aloud, “Well, Mr. ——, I beg your pardon, I am afraid I have not caught your name.”

“Mr. Ashton, Sir, at your service,” said the seedy man.

“Mr. Ashton, will you join me in a glass of brandy and water?”

CHAPTER III.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

THE seedy man was not at all averse to joining Rex Reverdon in a glass of brandy and water, nor in two glasses, nor yet in three. Mr. Miller watched him with unmitigated disgust, as he sat with his young friend, still closely wrapt up in the latter's carriage-rug, telling him long stories of Bermudian life and adventures. But to Rex he appeared in a different light. He was amusing—even his familiarity amused him, and the time on the ‘Glendower’ passed heavily: besides, he looked like a poor beggar who seldom had any kindness shown him. “Devilish hard up, too,” he had no doubt. Rex's generous young hand went to his well-filled purse as the thought struck him, and he would have lent Mr. Ashton money on the spot, if he had asked

him for it; and I have no doubt, had Mr. Ashton only guessed his good intentions, that it would not have been very long before he had made the demand. As it was, he confined himself to paving the way for future benefits. Their conversation ran chiefly upon the ups and downs of military life, and the petty scandals appertaining thereto. In the course of it, Mr. Ashton informed Rex of the nature of his profession. But this made no difference to the young man; he had seen at a glance that his travelling-companion was not a gentleman, he would have been less tolerable therefore in the position of one. A bandmaster was just about the grade Rex would have set him down at. "All the more to be pitied," was his internal reflection at the news; "in a situation one day, kicked out of it the next, and for no fault of his own, perhaps." I think an older man would have been readier to think it more than probable that it *was* for some fault of his own, and a very palpable fault, too, that Mr. Ashton had lost his place in H.M. 150th; but Rex gave himself no time to think about it here.

The bandmaster was very talkative, all the more so after his third glass of brandy and water, and had a great deal to talk about. It appeared to his listener as if he must have visited almost every military station in the British possessions, so familiar did he seem with India, Canada, and the Cape, to say nothing of our English and Irish garrison towns. The fact is, he had visited them all in his time. Clever at his profession, he had had little difficulty in procuring employment, which his unfortunate propensity for drinking had always as certainly, and almost as rapidly, deprived him of; but his last escapade, which had gained him his dismissal from the 150th, had been so glaringly published abroad that Mr. Ashton himself felt doubtful if he should succeed in getting employment in Her Majesty's service again. But this of course he kept to himself.

“Who is that person?” asked Mr. Miller, in defiance of all rules, of the man at the wheel, as he observed the close intercourse Rex was maintaining with the seedy stranger.

The man at the wheel had been on the line

for many years, and picked up all the scandal, as he plied his trade backwards and forwards, from every station that they called at.

“What, he?” he said, intimating whom he meant by a wink of his eye in the direction of Mr. Ashton—and then, breaking out into a smile of surprise at the ignorance of his questioner—“he’s as well knowed about here as Aldgate pump is; though,” added the man at the wheel, thoughtfully, “I don’t suppose they *do* know much about that pump in these parts neither.”

“What’s his name?”

“Why, bless me! don’t you even know his name?” demanded the man, with the greatest astonishment. “It ain’t for me to talk, Sir—particular on this deck—but you ask any one in Bermuda if they knows Mr. Ashton and his daughter, and see if they couldn’t tell you? Who *is* he? Well, I *am* blowed!”

Mr. Miller did not ask for any further information on the subject, particularly as the Captain just then came on deck, and the man at the wheel looked supernaturally grave, and

as if he never talked to anybody. But he thought, as he walked away, and passed Rex and the stranger still in amicable intercourse, that he would tell the former what he had heard, and warn him against making a disreputable acquaintance.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Ashton was again inflicting his new acquaintance with a list of his own virtues, musical and otherwise, and a taste of his weak point, the supposed tyranny of those in authority.

“If you had seen, Sir, the splendid appointment I gave up in order to meet the wishes of the Colonel of the 150th, and accompany the regiment to Bermuda:—Conductor of the King of Hanover’s private band, with a salary of—equal to five hundred a year. His Majesty might have procured scores of his own countrymen at a quarter the sum, but he had fixed his heart upon me. ‘The place is Ashton’s,’ he said, when remonstrated with on the subject, in his own lingo, Sir, of course.”

“I really wonder you gave up such an appointment as that,” exclaimed Rex, “to

follow a regiment. Why, I suppose your pay with the 150th was not half that sum?"

"Half, Sir? it was little more than a quarter. Now you touch me on a tender point, Sir. I am a father!"

Rex did not express so much astonishment at the news as the bandmaster intended that he should do, for Mr. Ashton had thrown quite a theatrical tone into the words, which seemed commonplace enough to his companion. To be a father seemed to Rex a natural evil, common to all men, if they lived long enough.

"I should have thought, the larger the family the more need of the money, Mr. Ashton," was his reply.

"You don't understand my motives, Sir. And how should you, before I have explained them? I have not a large family. I had the misfortune to lose Mrs. Ashton very early—(here the bandmaster, under the influence of the cold weather and the warm potations, grew quite pathetic)—but she left me one daughter—a fair delicate child, Sir, for whose health a warmer climate was necessary—and I was com-

pelled for her sake to resign the more lucrative appointment, and to accept the offer of the 150th. Poverty compels us to make many sacrifices, Sir; this has not been amongst the greatest of mine."

The seedy man twinkled his eyes and blew his nose at this point, with such a display of seedy virtue, that he made Rex feel quite uncomfortable.

"I should like," he continued, springing up from his seat as struck by a sudden thought, "I should like to introduce you to my daughter, Sir."

Rex was taken aback by the offer. He had not thought of the daughter as on board the 'Glendower,' and said so.

"Where else should she be, Sir?" was the bandmaster's reply. "My child and I have never parted. You are surprised, perhaps, not to have seen her upon deck at all. She feels the cold terribly. I beg you to accompany me to the saloon; I must make you acquainted with her."

He was still standing as he had risen, and

Rex had nothing to do but to follow him down the companion stairs. As he did so, he caught a look from Mr. Miller, which he returned with so comical an expression of annoyance at being entrapped into a voyage below, that that gentleman could not help laughing at his being so evidently taken in. Rex had seldom been in the saloon of the 'Glendower'—never, indeed, except at meals, when the general scramble for food made every one too busy with their own plates to leave them much leisure for scrutinising their neighbours. So he was not surprised at the fact that he might have overlooked Miss Ashton, particularly as he imagined from the way her father spoke of her, that she was a child, or nearly so. As he followed the bandmaster down the brass-bound circular steps, which led to the small and close saloon, knocking his handsome head every second against some thwart or beam of the lower deck, he did not feel at all disposed to bless him in his heart for bringing him from the open air to those stifling regions, to be introduced to an ordinary-looking lanky school-girl.

When Mr. Ashton arrived at the entrance of the saloon, he turned to Rex with an enquiring smile.

"Your name, Sir, I have not yet the pleasure of knowing."

"Reverdon," answered Rex shortly, and they entered the saloon. But it was empty.

"Here, Lizzie! Lizzie, my darling," said Mr. Ashton, at the door of one of the small cabins, which ran on either side of the general sitting-room, "I want you, love. I have a friend to introduce to you."

"Coming, papa," was the immediate answer. The voice was shrill and hard, like a musical instrument, without resonance, and Rex didn't like the sound of it. But when the speaker appeared he forgot the voice. He had expected a child, but she was a woman of at least his own age, and looked older than she was. She was very fair; indeed, could you have seen her, you would have acknowledged that no other words were necessary to describe her beauty, because there seemed nothing else to describe. Extreme fairness was her greatest charm. It was the

first and only thing which struck strangers upon seeing her. Her skin was white as alabaster, and no colour relieved the paleness of her complexion, excepting the scarlet of her lips, which, by the way, was not her own. Her hair, of which she had a large quantity, was pale gold-colour, almost flaxen, and very soft and fine; her eyes, not large, and set close to her nose (which was well-shaped), were of a clear, cold grey, like steel. Her face was an oval; her figure, small, slight, and graceful, and she had a trick of twisting it about in a serpentine manner, which showed it off to the greatest advantage. But the crowning feature of her face, the feature which would have made an impartial observer doubt the truth of this woman's words—even the truth of her actions—was her mouth. It was a hard mouth, a cold, cruel, deceitful mouth, with thin, compressed lips, which went ill with the steel-grey eyes.

But Rex Reverdon, even at this first moment of introduction to Elizabeth Ashton, could scarcely be called an impartial observer. In the first place, he was agreeably surprised to

find the object for whom he had knocked his head so often and encountered the stifling atmosphere of the saloon, was not so unworthy an object after all. In the second place, he was struck with her general appearance. And there is no doubt that Miss Ashton was a very striking-looking girl, and very unlike the usual run of women in her station of life.

Rex was a great admirer of the fair sex—a universal worshipper of the genus woman—as it was quite right he should be at two-and-twenty. He had passed that stage of hobble-de-hoyism when, first finding that their company is necessary to this world's happiness, boys fight shy of the other sex, and profess to dislike their society altogether; but neither had he arrived at that more sober time, when the full-grown man acknowledges that though life were a burden too heavy to be borne alone, yet that true and lasting pleasure lies in the possession of the one, not the smiles of the many. But all this time my hero is waiting for an introduction to Miss Ashton.

“My dear,” said her father, with the air of a

courtier introducing a subject to the notice of a crowned head, "allow me to introduce Mr. Reverdon to you—a gentleman whose acquaintance I have been fortunate enough to make upon deck."

Miss Ashton bowed in a very pretty manner, and said something about the pleasure, &c., and Mr. Reverdon caught himself looking with interest at certain graceful lines and curves about the slight figure, which the bending movement brought into conspicuous play. Then they all sat down near one of the tables, and commenced a conversation.

"Are you better, my child?" demanded the bandmaster, as a preliminary step to general converse.

"Not much, papa," was the answer.

Mr. Reverdon hoped that Miss Ashton was not suffering in any way.

"No. I suppose I mustn't call it suffering," she answered, laughing; "but I am a wretched sailor, and the heat of the cabin and this saloon makes me worse."

"Don't you think you would be better

above?” suggested Rex. “The want of ventilation is so bad between decks. You should come up in the air.”

“I know it would do me good,” said Miss Ashton; “but it is so cold, isn’t it?” and she gave an involuntary shiver as she spoke.

Rex glanced at the thin faded muslin dress which she wore, and thought she must feel it cold indeed. The bandmaster saw the glance and noticed it.

“Mr. Reverdon does not understand, my darling—he is happily in circumstances not to understand—that want of those little luxuries which it is not in my power to procure for you, prevents your taking advantage of the benefit which the sea air might afford you. You *would* find it very cold on deck—far too cold for your delicate frame.”

“Ah! Mr. Reverdon is very happy *not* to be able to understand,” said the fair Lizzie, as she dropped her eyes modestly from beneath his gaze.

Rex felt quite uncomfortable at being accused of being in circumstances which prevented his

sympathizing with, or even comprehending the difficulties of others. He wanted to say something, or to offer something, but if he felt delicate about lending the father any of his own comforts, he felt doubly so with respect to the daughter, yet he ventured to remark—

“If I might offer——”

“Enough, Sir, enough,” said the ex-bandmaster with a wave of the hand; “you have already laid me under an obligation, we could not think of trespassing upon you further.”

“But it is no obligation,” urged Rex, eagerly; “I should be only too much flattered and honoured if Miss Ashton would condescend to use such as I have to offer. I was going to suggest that I have another rug in my cabin; and between us, I think, we could manage to wrap Miss Ashton up so warmly in my arm chair, that she would not feel the wind at all too strong.”

“Oh! I should be so grateful,” said the girl, with another glance from under her eyelids at Rex. “I quite sigh for the fresh air.”

“Let us do it at once, Mr. Ashton,” said the

young man, on whom the look was not lost; and suiting the action to the word, he fetched the extra rug from his cabin, and Miss Ashton being nothing loath, the two men soon conveyed her upon deck, and having ensconced her comfortably in the easy chair and wrapt the rugs well around her feet and figure, sat down on the skylight by her side, each with a cigar in his mouth. Mr. Miller's astonishment at Rex's ready return to deck, with a young lady in tow, may be better imagined than described. He could hardly believe his eyes; but if his own sense had not told him who it was, the remark of his friend at the wheel soon enlightened him.

"That's she," he said, as he caught sight of the fair hair and face of Elizabeth Ashton; "that's the old gentleman's daughter, and a nice pair they are."

"Rex is insane," thought Mr. Miller; "however, it is fortunate half our voyage is over, and it is such a short one, or he might find such acquaintances difficult to shake off again."

In the meanwhile Rex sat jauntily astride a corner of the skylight, his cigar between his lips,

whilst he talked to Miss Ashton and watched the breeze sport with her soft light hair, which she wore in rather a loose and negligent style. The young lady proved no less communicative than her father had done, and gave Rex a very animated description of the style of living pursued by the Europeans in the West India Isles. Then she became suddenly silent, and leaned her head against her hand, complaining of slight headache, which caused Rex another journey to his cabin in search of eau de Cologne, which he produced for her use in a silver-stoppered bottle, part of the furniture of his dressing-case. When the summons to tea sounded, Miss Ashton was too comfortable to move, but Mr. Reverdon was quite ready to fetch her all she wanted, which was but little; for as she said, "It was quite enough for her to sit in that *delightful* fresh air, so *beautifully* wrapt up as she was by Mr. Reverdon's kindness, smelling that *delicious* eau de Cologne he had been so good as to lend her."

And when night fell, and Miss Ashton had to descend to her cabin, Rex would not hear of

either bottle or scent being returned to him.—“It is no earthly use to me,” he pleaded, “I should never use it, Miss Ashton;” and the look of gratitude Miss Ashton bestowed upon him from beneath her fair eyelids was sufficient to make the foolish young fellow think a great deal more than were necessary as he paced the deck that night, under the light of the moon, of the coming morning, which should introduce him to her presence again. Mr. Miller’s opinions on the subject he heartily pooh-poohed.

“You are such an illiberal fellow, Miller,” he said, in answer; “you think no one who is out of elbows can be honest. Why what harm on earth could *I* get by their company, even if they are all you try to make them out? Not show the slightest attention to a woman on board-ship, or kindness to an ill-used wretch like the father, just because their station in life may be a little lower than my own? Why, hang it! I couldn’t do otherwise, and if I could I don’t mean to.”

So that matter was settled.

Not only the next morning, but every morning, afternoon, and evening which passed, until

the 'Glendower' reached the London Docks, did Rex Reverdon spend in the company of the seedy Mr. Ashton and his daughter.

Offers of eau de Cologne and carriage rugs were followed by offers of various other articles of gentleman's property that could be turned to profit in the lady's use. Champagne was suggested as a first-rate cure for sea-sickness, and many a cork of it flew on the quarter deck, at the expense of Mr. Rex Reverdon. Other expenses he incurred also, for the same fair object, although the days were few before they reached their destination: but we all know that a great deal can be done in a few days. Several confidential conversations during that time passed between Miss Ashton and Rex Reverdon—particularly when her father's back was turned and she could venture to unsay some of his sayings, to her own advantage. Those few days sufficed to enlighten Rex as to the father's character and failings, thanks to the daughter's revelations; but the knowledge had only strengthened the intimacy between themselves. He looked upon her now as doubly an object of

pity,—a victim to her father's vices as well as to the curse of poverty. Miss Ashton knew well enough the quality of the stuff she was working upon. At last the 'Glendower' reached the Docks; but here, even Mr. Miller was unprepared for the intelligence that Mr. Reverdon had *just* promised to see Miss Ashton safely home, before he joined him at his own residence, where Mr. Miller was to stay the night."

"Miss Ashton has her father to attend to her, Rex. Surely he must be sufficient escort."

"I have promised," repeated Rex. "Never you mind me, Miller; I shall join you at dinner this evening."

He did not say that owing to a very broad hint from Elizabeth Ashton he knew they had no home to go to on arrival, and that he could not bear the idea that she should be landed in such a wilderness as London, friendless and almost penniless. For the ex-bandmaster's comfort I am afraid he cared little.

The 'Glendower' anchored at mid-day, and Rex joined his friend Mr. Miller again in time for a six o'clock dinner. The latter did not

question him as to where he had been, or what he had done. The very name of Ashton made him angry. He showed his want of sympathy with the tastes of his friend, by keeping silence on the subject.

But Rex cared nothing for this, he preferred silence to questioning. The conversation at the dinner-table and afterwards ran wholly on his own future prospects.

“I really mean to pull up and live very quietly now, Miller. I shall do away with my Oxford den altogether, and only keep up this house and some three or four horses in the stables. I can’t go far wrong then, can I?”

As far as that went, if Rex really meant to do only what he said, two thousand a year would have been ample to accomplish his desires, but Mr. Miller knew that such an establishment would bring with it an innumerable train of expensive evils, and stand in the master of it far more than he imagined.

“Why this house, my dear Rex?” he said, in answer. “I would sooner advise your retaining Crofton Lodge, and coming up to town when-

ever you required it. To live in London always entails great expenses, and you are not a man to resist country pleasures. The end of it will be, that you will keep as good as two establishments still.”

“Oh, no! I assure you not,” said Rex; “when I want a little hunting, shooting, or so on, I can run down to some of my friends; but I couldn’t exist out of town as a permanency. It would take me out of my set altogether.”

Mr. Miller thought within himself, that that fact would not be the evil most to be regretted in the step advised, but he did not say so. “You will have to be very careful, Rex,” he simply answered. “Don’t forget that you have no longer ten thousand a year. If you really live quietly, you will do; but you must be careful.”

I suppose Rex Reverdon recommenced his housekeeping, with a genuine intention of doing as he had said; but still he was rather ignorant as to the value of money, and the establishment in South Street, Park Lane, did not appear palpably to diminish in the splendour of

its adornments or retinue. "The Grange" was sold, thanks to Mr. Miller's activity and energy on the occasion, and the "den" at Oxford, was relet to some wealthy bachelor, but still South Street, Park Lane, consumed a vast amount of coin. Rex might acknowledge the diminution of his fortune, but Rex's friends did not, and there was one, a particular friend of his, an Oxford chum of the name of Halkett, who being a poor man himself, seemed, like many other poor men, to see no end to the riches of his friends. It would have been well for Rex if that friendship had never been made, or being made continued, but who was to know it. Henry Halkett was a man of excellent family, though an impoverished one, of unimpeachable manners and (apparently) morals; the only one of Rex's numerous friends of whom his noble grandfather (who noticed our hero about as much as his mother did) had been pleased to say, upon inspection, was fit to hold the office of friend to a descendant of the Littletons. And yet there was not an acquaintance of Rex's, however beneath him in station,

who did not do him less harm than this same Henry Halkett, approved by the Earl of Littleton.

Rex's own connexions and family, his former liberality and fortune, all combined to bring a large circle of friends still around him, and as Mr. Miller had foreseen, he had not the courage to behave to them less hospitably than he had done. He had not sufficient “pluck,” as he called it himself, to make a stand against these called-for dinners and suppers, and acknowledge himself a poorer man. He still dressed, and rode, and drove as he had done upon his former income, and what was worse, he had still the same open hand, the same liberal disposition, which made him forget in the pleasure of giving that justice is before generosity. During the next year, Mr. Miller saw very little of his quondam ward. What he did see he could not approve of, and his disapproval was not met in the same spirit which made him give expression to it.

“The island smash was bad enough,” he observed on one occasion to Colonel Clementon,

(with which gentleman he still kept up an intimacy, although their joint partnership as guardians was dissolved,) “but it was nothing to what this will be when it comes, Clementon; it will be total ruin—mark my words—there can be nothing saved out of this wreck.”

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. “What is to be done,” he said, “when a man won’t bear speaking to? Rex is too fond of dissipation, Miller, and I never knew a man keep his head above water where that is the case. It would have been all the same, if he had had his ten thousand still.”

In the meanwhile Rex had not lost sight of the bandmaster and the bandmaster’s daughter. Mr. Ashton’s surmises about himself were so far true, that he found it impossible to get employment again amongst Her Majesty’s regimental bands. His character, by this time, was too well known, and preceded him everywhere. But through Rex’s influence, he got an engagement in the orchestra of one of the London theatres, and so far he was able to keep bread in his daughter’s mouth. And this bread

had a good deal of butter supplied to it by the hands of Rex Reverdon. He had never forsaken her. He still continued his visits to the little house at Islington, which had been first secured to them through his agency. More than half their income came through presents from him to Miss Ashton; presents not only of dress, and other necessary articles for an existence of civilization, but presents of money also. But do not misunderstand me; as far as Rex Reverdon was concerned, Elizabeth Ashton was pure as driven snow, nor had he any intention she should be otherwise. He was wild as wild could be, very careless and godless, at times bitterly reckless, but he was never dishonourable. Perhaps the world—his own little world of friends—did not believe it of him, but he knew it for himself, and that was sufficient. But it was not sufficient to stay the ruin he was bringing down upon his own head. It was not sufficient to prevent cloud after cloud gathering in the horizon of his affairs, which he saw and yet heeded not. There is a time in all our lives when we first seem to commence living.

All that went before is tame and unprofitable compared to it, often all that follows it appears the same. It is the tornado in a man's existence, that either sweeps his household gods away before it, leaving him bereft of what made his inward and outward comfort in this world, or else, expending its violence upon his moral atmosphere alone, purifies and disinfects it by its very force of action. Such an epoch was now approaching in the life of Rex Reverdon. At twenty-five he commenced to live !

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY AFTER THE DERBY.

IT was the day after the Derby of 1851, and Rex Reverdon sat alone in his morning-room, his dressing-gown still about him, his breakfast untasted on the table by his side. The races that year had been unusually exciting, the race-course unusually crowded, the large influx of foreign visitors which the impending Great Exhibition had attracted to our shores having crowded even Epsom Downs. Fabulous sums of money were reported to have changed hands since the day preceding; men almost penniless twenty-four hours before, were now in possession of thousands. Some, who had commenced the day in comfortable circumstances, had nothing now but ruin staring them in the face. Amongst the latter was my hero. I am wrong

though in saying he commenced the Derby Day in comfortable circumstances ; he had known from the beginning that he would sink or swim before the race was over, and no man can be comfortable under such knowledge. But now it was past ; the excitement of suspense, the bravado of failure, were alike over, and Rex had nothing to do but to pay up and think.

Pleasant thought it must have been ! He had been sinking deeper and deeper into debt for the last twelve months, and sinking with his eyes open. Now he had made one desperate venture to float himself again, and it had failed. There was nothing left for him, but to go to the bottom. He felt it to be so, as he sat there.

Could any greater punishment be invented for a man than to force him to review the faults and follies of a wasted life, and to feel they are all to be laid at his own door. As Rex thought of the fortune he had frittered away, or suffered others to fritter away for him, and remembered for *what* it had gone, he loathed the luxury around him. And there was plenty of it to loathe. He called the room he sat in his morning-room, but

it might have been a lady's boudoir, for the costliness of its fittings and adornments. Rex was a great lover of the fine arts ; he had never been able to resist a good picture when he came across it, consequently his walls were hung with originals that many a picture-gallery might have coveted. He liked Sèvres china, too, and Bohemian glass, and had a great fancy for collecting knick-knacks, and lumbering up his tables with *objets de vertu*, both ancient and modern, to say nothing of having every new book that appeared added to his library, whether it was worthy the honour or not. We should all like to be able to do the same, but these things cost money, and I suppose no one but a collector of such luxuries knows with what a quantity of money they run away. But Rex had never learnt the art of self-denial, and this was the consequence—utter ruin ! On the table beside him lay his pocket and memorandum book. He knew without looking at it how far his liabilities exceeded his means. No need to add up the figures again ; any way he took them, backward or forward, they always came to the same total—a total

which it was impossible he could pay. If he could have done so, I do not think Rex would have so much cared for himself; but in his folly and excitement he had betted far above his means. Besides this, he owed money everywhere, but these were debts of honour (so-called), and they must be paid on settling-day, or there was an unpleasant alternative called "posting." As Rex thought of it, he ground his teeth together.

"Mr. Halkett, Sir; will you see him?"

"Yes, of course; show him up."

He was the very man Rex most wanted to see; he felt he must unburden himself to some one. When his friend entered the room, and the door was shut, his first words were to the point.

"Halkett, it's all over with me! I'm ruined."

"Not quite so bad as that, I hope, old boy."

Mr. Halkett had anything but a pleasant face; at least, most women would have thought so. He was one of those men that men swear by as being very handsome, and you never find the

sexes agree on such a subject. Somebody had once described him to somebody else as “a well-fed beast with black points,” and the description was characteristic if not elegant. He had dark hair and eyes, and a high, aquiline nose, which gave him the look of a bird of prey; a figure about the middle height, and inclining to stout, and white hands, with filbert-nails, which he kept very long, and of which he was absurdly particular, always looking after and examining them when in the presence of others. His age was something under thirty; he was, by profession, a barrister, but he seldom did any other work than lounging about the park and his friends’ houses, and living at other people’s expense. He may have been very gentlemanly, but he was anything but upright and true. He it was who by his advice had led Rex from one extravagance to another, until he had so seriously involved himself that there appeared no means of extrication except by that one fearful venture on the Epsom races, which had ended by entirely stranding him. And now he had the coolness to walk in with an air of careless disbelief in his

friend's assertion of ruin, and to say that he hoped it wasn't quite so bad as that, old boy !

The tone of his voice, which was intended to be consolatory, nettled Rex, and he chafed under it.

"Well, it is quite as bad as that, so it's no use your hoping. I've lost every shilling I betted yesterday. I'm down for thousands."

Mr. Halkett's only reply to this communication was a low, long whistle.

"Didn't you 'hedge' at all, then?"

"No, fool that I was ; I didn't half make up my book as I ought to have done. I was so sure of Hernandez winning. Why, you said yourself there was no fear whatever of him."

"So I thought," rejoined his friend.

"Have you lost on him?" asked Rex.

"Yes, of course, I have, heavily ; but not to your extent. Who'd have thought of Teddington coming in first? It's always the way with these d——d races."

Mr. Halkett did not consider it worth while to mention that if he had lost upon Hernandez he had considerably won upon Teddington.

When he advised his friends to hedge, he certainly only advised them to do what he did himself. His whole life was a system of "hedging." Henry Halkett had never yet been found "nowhere."

"Well! it's of no use thinking of it now," next observed Rex, "the thing's done. The question is, how am I to pay it all? I went in to a frightful extent yesterday, and have regularly floored myself, but the money must be forthcoming by settling-day."

"Sell up," suggested Halkett.

"Sell up," said Rex; "what, this house-full, you mean? It would only be a drop in the ocean, Halkett. I owe money on all sides. I can't tell you how much I owe. If my tradespeople were to hear of my selling up, they would come down upon me directly. I haven't drawn all my principal. I can manage my debts of honour on the rest of that; but, then, there are the bills, and what am I to live on? I've no profession, as you know. There's nothing for it but to cut my throat or enlist, and that's the truth!"

"Oh! hang it, man, don't talk in that strain,

you'll give me the blues frightfully. Now, I know of a means by which you can get all straight again, if you would only look at it in a proper light ; though, I believe, you would rather take the alternative of cutting your throat !”

“What is it ?” said Rex, indifferently.

“Marry !”

“Marry ? Who ?”

“Miss Fane.”

“Miss Fane ! What nonsense ; I don't know her.”

“Now it's you who's talking nonsense, my dear fellow, and not me. Why, you've visited at the Peytons intimately for the last twelve months. What do you call not knowing her ?”

“She's twice my age,” observed Rex.

“Not exactly ; and if she was, it wouldn't signify : it's her money you want ; not her. She's got plenty of that, all under her own control, and under yours, if you choose, I expect, for I'm sure she likes you.”

Rex was startled now out of his apathy. “What reason have you for saying that, Halkett ?”

Halkett laughed.

“My powers of observation, my dear Reverdon. Why any one could see it, with half an eye. She’s been ‘spooney’ on you for the last six months.”

“By Jove!” said Rex, with a look of surprise; and then added, in a hurried manner, “but I couldn’t marry, Halkett,—I couldn’t indeed; there are reasons against it.”

“What reasons?” demanded his friend.

But Rex did not appear to hear him; he was gazing into the distance again, thinking. He was thinking of Elizabeth Ashton. He had gone on making his periodical visits to that little house at Islington—visits when the father was generally out, and he and Miss Ashton had had their time to themselves—until he would have missed them sadly if he had not gone. Even in the midst of his prosperity, when his house had been full of company, his days filled up with engagements, and his time passed in going from one scene of excitement to another, still the little house at Islington had not lost its charm for him, and he would steal away from his friends, or fail to fulfil

some appointment, rather than give up his couple of hours in that tiny parlour, talking with Miss Ashton of things past, present, and to come. Almost shut out from home and its affections, with but few calls upon his love, it was delightful to Rex to feel that this woman welcomed him as her best friend—that to him she owed all her little comforts—and that she acknowledged it, too, and blended up love and gratitude in such charming confusion in her acknowledgment of his kindness, that he scarcely knew which it was she felt for him, and did not care to disentangle the feelings and find out. The footing he maintained in her presence was that of half brother, half friend, and he had never spoken a word of love to her, except under those characters. He never intended to do so; and yet that soft flaxen hair, and those clear grey eyes, had become strangely familiar to him—strangely mixed up with all his thoughts of the future—and somehow, the idea of marriage jarred upon his senses. This was not the first time it had been suggested to him. His mother, Mr. Miller, even Colonel Clementon, confirmed bachelor as he had been

himself all his own life, had each spoken to Rex, at different times, about marriage, and urged his taking the step. But whenever the idea had been mooted to him, the remembrance of Elizabeth Ashton (Pearl, as he had come to call her in their familiar intercourse, in compliment to her extreme fairness) used to intervene between him and the thought of such a thing. It did so now, as his friend Mr. Halkett mentioned Miss Fane, and as he pursued the idea, he forgot to continue the conversation.

“What are you thinking of, Rex?” said the other, presently.

Rex started, and almost coloured.

“Nothing ; that is, nothing in particular.”

“You haven’t got another affair on hand, have you, Rex ?—not booked, eh ?”

“Not exactly,” returned Rex, with an attempt at laughing ; but his mirth was feeble.

“Then what reason is there against your marrying Miss Fane ?”

“Are you sure she’d take me ?”

“Now, Rex, it’s no use beating about the bush like that. The question is, Will you take

her, and save yourself from ruin, or go to the dogs altogether? I know for certain her fortune is at least fifteen hundred a year. Why, it would be the saving of you, man; you've got nothing else to look to now but a wife with money."

"I suppose not," answered Rex, sadly; "but do you know, Halkett, I feel as if I'd almost rather go to the dogs of the two. I'm an awfully wild fellow, I am well aware; but there has always seemed to me something too holy in the name of a wife, to be mixed up with things of this world, or to be given to a woman you don't care a hang about. I don't think I could do it."

"Reverdon, there's somebody else in the wind; it's no good your pretending to deny it."

"Well! if you will have it, you must. I don't see why I shouldn't tell you either, for you are almost like a brother to me, Halkett. I'm afraid I'm getting spooney upon Pearl Ashton. The thought of her sticks in my throat whenever I think of marriage; and that's the long and short of it. I know I'm an awful fool!"

Henry Halkett put his hands into his pockets, and, leaning back in his chair, looked at his friend as if he thought he had gone suddenly stark staring mad.

And then he said, quietly—

“Well, you *are* a fool, Reverdon!”

At this, the other started up from his chair, his face all aflame, and his brows lowered,—“If I am, it’s not for you to tell me of it,” he exclaimed, angrily.

“Sit down, my good fellow; sit down,” said Halkett, soothingly; “there’s nothing to excite yourself about; you said you knew it yourself.”

Rex sat down again, as he was desired, but he looked exceedingly angry, and his back was turned towards his friend.

“Now, look here, Rex,” commenced Halkett,—but Rex never turned his head at the words: “What on earth has your being spooney on Pearl Ashton got to do with your marrying Miss Fane? *Of course* you’re spooney there. *I* knew it—ages ago! What’s the odds?”

“What’s the odds?” said Rex, mimicking his tone of voice. “Why, the odds are, that it is

not very pleasant to become the husband of one woman, when you know you care for another at heart. I know *I* shouldn't find it so."

"But you never could have married Pearl Ashton—under any circumstances."

"I know that," rejoined Rex, testily; "I didn't intend to marry her; but if I marry another woman, I must break with Pearl altogether, and I don't relish the idea of it."

"Why?"

The question was asked with apparently so much genuine surprise and good faith, that Rex looked up at the speaker, no less surprised himself; but he did not answer at once, and it was repeated.

"Why?"

"Because," said Rex, hotly, "I can't see her, knowing that I am fond of her, and not tell her so, and I am a gentleman, and not a blackguard; that's why."

"You use rather strong expressions, my dear fellow," said Halkett, presently. "I cannot see, since you intend nothing more than friendship for Miss Ashton, why your marriage with Miss

Fane should interrupt your intercourse with her. It would be a great blow to her if you did. She's very fond of you, poor girl!”

There was a touch of sarcasm in these last words of Mr. Halkett's, for he believed no more that Rex Reverdon's intimacy with Pearl Ashton was one of friendship than he believed it would have been so had he been placed under the same circumstances regarding her.

“I know she is,” said Rex, believing what he said, “and that's why it must be neck or nothing between her and me. I have one other chance, Halkett. If I can get my mother to lend me the money for a commission, I'll sell all I possess, and enter the army at once, and my remaining debts must be liquidated by degrees.”

“But you're past that, Rex,” observed his friend; “you're too old: it's against the regulations.”

“Hang the regulations!” exclaimed Rex; and then, as if ashamed of his hastiness, he added, “Yes, I could, Halkett. I could get into the cavalry if I tried. Huntley's got no end of interest at the War Office. Why, look

at Blair last year. Got in without the slightest trouble ; it's done every day. Any way, I shall make the attempt. It is better to work than to be tied for life to a person you don't care for."

And the manly, right-thinking heart glowed as it pondered on the other chance which at first sight appeared practicable. But Mr. Halkett knew Lady Charlotte Huntley well, and was not therefore disposed to take a sanguine view of this idea. He shook his head.

"A bad chance, I'm afraid, Rex. Her Ladyship has not been so overpleased at your possession of the money to help you out of difficulty when you have lost it. No, no ; stick to Miss Fane. That's the only thing for you. Are you not going there to-night ?"

"I *was*," said Rex, his ardour down again to zero.

"You *are*, you mean. You certainly must not miss such an opportunity of reconnoitring your ground. Now, just take a good look at her, Rex, this evening, for she's a very fine woman, and if she is a trifle older than yourself, what matter. It's the money you want, my

boy. You once give out that you're engaged to an heiress, and I'll bet three to one your tradespeople will wait patiently enough; and even if you want to raise a bill to meet your liabilities on settling-day, I think I know the man who will do it for you on a quiet hint, and wait for his money till the marriage is over."

I am afraid Mr. Henry Halkett had known too many of these obliging people who were always ready to raise money convenient to poor Rex's hand, which he did not find it so convenient to repay. But he had been caught once too often.

"No, thank you, Halkett," he said in reply. "I've too many of those bits of paper flying about the place as it is. This last business must be settled out of the remains of my principal. I won't raise any more money. I shall run down to Wimbledon this afternoon and see Lady Charlotte, and if I can't bring her to anything like terms, why, then I suppose I must take your advice, and go in for Miss Fane. But it seems deuced hard that a young fellow like me should be tied to a woman old enough to be my grandmother!"

“Deuced hard? Deuced lucky you mean! Come, Reverdon, I must be off; but I shall see you to-night at the Peytons. Now, don’t you be brooding over that house at Islington, or Miss Fane’s age, or any such nonsense, but think of her fifteen hundred a year, and keep your spirits up. *Au revoir.*”

Mr. Halkett was not wholly unactuated by personal feeling in his anxiety that his friend should marry the heiress. In the first place Rex’s house was one that he could ill spare as a place of call; in the second Rex owed him a considerable sum of money which he was unwilling to lose. Under these circumstances, it may be a matter of surprise that he did not attempt to win the lady for himself, but he had good reasons for not doing so, and the best was, that he was perfectly certain that she never would have accepted him as a husband. But with regard to Rex Reverdon, he felt as perfectly certain the other way. He left our hero much in the same position in which we found him, leaning his head upon his hand and musing. He felt terribly alone in his trouble. Even

Halkett, boon companion and greatest chum as he had been, seemed further from him than usual now that he needed him most. Halkett had proposed the very thing Rex most disliked the idea of, as the only remedy for his misfortune. Surely he might have thought of something as feasible, and at the same time pleasanter. But though Rex thus blamed his friend, he could not think of any better mode himself of getting out of his scrape. He felt as doubtful about his mother helping him as Mr. Halkett had done, and his step-father, Mr. Huntley, was a mere tool in her hands—a nonentity in his own household, and who hadn't it in his power to aid his stepson if he had wished to do so. As to getting a commission without her help, it was out of the question. Having paid his debts of honour, if he attempted to obtain the price by the sale of his effects, his other creditors would be down upon him, and expect him to liquidate their claims also out of a cornet's pay. No, that wouldn't do. There were only the two chances for him. He had best set about the first one as quickly as he could. As Rex thought

so, he rose with the intention of completing his toilet. The reflection of his face looked wild and haggard as he caught a sight of it in the opposite glass, as if he had not slept the night before, as indeed was only too true. He had not even been in bed. He looked deadly pale as he smoothed his ruffled hair before the mirror with his hand, and caressingly stroked down the short crisp golden beard which had already become his heritage. There was not much mirth now or wickedness either in the blue eyes which encountered his gaze, and the lines of his mouth were visibly depressed, even through his moustaches. He rang the bell to give some orders to his valet, but it was answered by a pretty waiting-maid. Rex always had maid-servants to wait on him, except about his own person, and the ugly ones knew better than to apply for the situations. He said they were so much more nimble, quiet, and light-handed than men in waiting, and so much pleasanter to look at: and so they were, doubtless. Rex's friends were of just the same opinion as himself.

"If you please, Sir, did you ring?"

"I rang for Williams, Mary," was her master's answer, unaccompanied by any of the cheerful looks or badinage he usually bestowed upon the female part of his retinue.

"I'll tell him, Sir; and if you please, Sir, there's a gentleman wants to see you."

"A gentleman? What's his name?"

"He didn't give his name, Sir; he said he wanted to see Mr. Reverdon."

"Are you sure he is a gentleman?"

Maid-servants always make stupid mistakes, and particularly pretty maid-servants. Mary was no exception to the rule. She answered with the greatest confidence—

"Oh, yes, Sir, I knows a gentleman when I see one."

"Well, show him into the library, and say I'll be down directly, and send Williams to me here."

When Rex had attired himself by the aid of Williams in his walking suit, he proceeded leisurely towards the library, turning his hat round and round in his hand to render it smooth

by the influence of his irreproachable kid gloves. But when he entered the library he saw at once that the person the stupid maid-servant had shewn in there, was not a gentleman, and had no pretensions to be one, except perhaps in his own conceit. He was a young man, dressed in a decent suit of black, whom Rex never remembered to have seen before. He was annoyed at having been brought down to hold an interview with some begging-letter writer perhaps, and he spoke sharply in consequence.

“What may your business be with me?”

“Mr. Reverdon, Sir?”

“Yes—who do you come from?”

“From Messrs. Randall and French, Sir, of New Bond Street. I was directed to call on you with their little account, which they would feel obliged if you could conveniently settle, as they have a large bill to meet shortly. The account has been running some time, Sir.”

As the man spoke he produced the bill from his pocket, enclosed in an envelope emblazoned with the unpleasant letters, R. and F., in all manners of fine gold flourishes about the seal.

As Rex took it in his hand he felt the cold perspiration come out in beads upon his forehead and remain there. It was the first time in his life he had been dunned. The “little” account presented was one of the largest that he owed—an account that had run on for the last three years, and accumulated every month that it ran. He did not break the seal, but he knew well enough that there must be a long list inside of purchased brooches and rings, bracelets and earrings, female frippery to adorn female vice, conjointly with many an article of expensive luxury for his own use, and whole services of plate which was most carelessly used and thrown about by his household.

Poor Rex ! his luck was indeed down.

“What makes Messrs. Randall and French send their account in now?” he demanded, in a tone which was meant to be indifferent; “it is neither Midsummer nor Christmas. I’m not accustomed to pay my bills at all kinds of odd times. There, take it back to them,” tossing it to the man as he spoke, “and tell them if they send it in at the proper season, I will pay it.”

“But I received orders not to leave the house without the money, Sir; Messrs. Randall and French are in want of it, Sir.”

“Do Messrs. Randall and French mean to be insolent?” now demanded Rex, firing up; “if so you had better think twice before you bring me their messages again, or I’ll kick you out of my house.”

The shopman didn’t like the appearance of Rex in the character of the roused lion, and shrunk into his shoes.

“Can I tell Messrs. Randall and French *when* it will be convenient for you to settle their account, Sir?” he asked in a humbler tone.

“You may tell Messrs. Randall and French from me to go to the devil. I shall pay them when I think proper. There’s the door—you can go.”

The man was too alarmed to remonstrate, and commenced to do as he was told: but as the door opened a footman appeared—

“A messenger from Mr. Butterley, Sir, the tailor, waiting to see you, and this has just come

by the post," laying a letter on the table as he spoke.

Rex gave one glance at it, recognized another tradesman's name upon the envelope, and throwing it without further scrutiny on one side, took up his hat and stick and walked into the hall.

"I can't see anybody else to-day, John," he said in passing to the footman; "I have business of importance taking me elsewhere," and without so much as noticing the astonished tailor's assistant, he jumped into his cab and was off to Wimbledon.

"They are all coming down upon me, the bloodhounds," he muttered to himself as he drove rapidly along, "they have heard of my losses yesterday without doubt, and are on the track of blood already. Never mind, I'll double and elude them, or my name's not Rex Reverdon."

CHAPTER V.

LOST TROUBLE.

AND yet he felt very sick at heart, as he drove along that smooth turnpike road to Wimbledon, which required so little exercise of his skill as a whip, to divert his thoughts from the subject which was troubling them. He kept repeating to himself that he had two chances, but he knew well enough all the time that he had but one.

Do you think it unnatural that Lady Charlotte Huntley should have taken such a dislike to the child she had brought into the world, such an antipathy to her own flesh and blood, that it was folly to hope for a moment that she would help him in his time of need? He had been wild and thoughtless and extravagant, but he had never injured her, except, indeed, by being born. It appears so unlikely that his own

mother could not have felt for the scrape he had got into, and done her best to save him from its consequences. It does seem unlikely. More than that, it seems unnatural; and yet it is not untrue to nature—nature, as we have degraded her by the indulgence of our own corrupt feelings. If you have not met such instances in your journeyings through the Valley of Baca, it is because you have travelled with your eyes shut. I could show them to you by the dozen—instances where the holy relationship of mother and child, which has been made the subject of poets' happiest thoughts, the basis of theological discourses, even been mentioned in the greatest Book of all as the best comparison that could be found—the only earthly comparison that could be found—for the love of the Divine towards mortality, has been so stripped of all its holiness, that you would scarcely have recognized it as such. Mothers who are indifferent to their children, from the time they first receive them as helpless infants, to the time when they leave the home-roof for the world, full grown men and women—that world which is not indifferent to

the number of its victims, but will draw them to her and suck them in greedily, (not having that cord of strength a mother's love to hold them back,) until they become mingled and absorbed in her vanities and vices, and are not to be disentangled again by any earthly persuasion. Mothers, who get tired of their children, as the children themselves weary of a new toy; or who love some of them above others, and thus awaken all the worst passions of the neglected ones, only to find them turned against themselves. Mothers, who destroy the sacred feelings of respect towards a mother, which are born with their little ones, by placing no control over their own tempers, or disregard of truth, or any of the thousand and one faults to which we are all subject; and, worst of all, mothers who are jealous of their offspring. And this was Lady Charlotte's feeling towards Rex; she was jealous of him; she had been so from the beginning. Having married her first husband not only without love for himself, but with her heart occupied with the remembrance of another man, she had seen the father's affection for his

little son with intense jealousy. Of course, *she* was nothing in the house, and the son and heir was everything. This, as you may suppose, did not tend to increase her maternal love, if she ever possessed any, for the child of the man she disliked. When Mr. Reverdon died, and she found that Rex was left so totally independent of herself, these feelings grew stronger. If she had been left sole trustee and executrix of her husband's will, the case might have been different. As it was, she would not fill what she considered a secondary place. So Rex was given up almost entirely, as we have seen, to the control and management of his guardians. But Lady Charlotte must have had a soft spot somewhere in her heart, during those ten years of married life, where the remembrance of that handsome young commoner who had been sent about his business by the Earl and Countess of Littlelin had managed to keep a place for itself. Perhaps she was not so much to blame as she appears in these pages. Doubtless she suffered in that time, and in so doing earned at least the right of pity from all those who know what suf-

fering is. Any way, for the son of her second husband, the handsome, foolish, Mr. Huntley, Lady Charlotte had as much love as would have done for the two. There was only this one son by the second marriage; all the other children were little girls, still in the school-room and nursery. This had been a trouble to Lady Charlotte, for a great misfortune had overtaken this cherished son, Gabriel Huntley. Shortly after his birth, he had sustained a severe fall, through the carelessness of a nurse. The accident was not thought much of at the time, but as the child grew, a weakness was observed in his back, and before he had reached his tenth year, he was found to have a tendency to spinal complaint. Nothing to be alarmed at, the doctors had said: a few years, at the most, in a recumbent position, and the worst symptoms would be found to have disappeared, and time and care would do the rest. But Gabriel Huntley had been on his back for the last five years, and the worst symptoms had not disappeared; indeed, they had greatly increased, and the boy's bodily health was failing under the continued restraint

and want of exercise. A dear boy he was, notwithstanding that he was the son of Lady Charlotte and Mr. Huntley ; and no one wondered that, under the sad circumstances of his misfortune, his mother almost idolised him. He was at this time just fifteen years old, a tall, slight boy for his age, with large, dark, luminous eyes, full of thought, a high, white forehead, and delicate features—too delicate for his years. He was a boy of intellect, who delighted in devouring all the new literature of the day, and in making his own feeble attempts at both prose and poetry ; and a boy of music, who had taught himself to play and sing without instruction, and who loved to have his chair wheeled to the pianoforte, and to sit there in the dusky evenings, whilst the solemn chants and melancholy strains, which he usually composed, sounded like his own requiem through the stillness of the gathering night. There were few who did not love Gabriel Huntley, but he was not a universal lover himself.

Towards his father he appeared simply indifferent ; and the noise of his healthy little sisters

he could seldom tolerate. His mother's affection he returned with a great deal of gratitude, mingled with pity that he could not more reciprocate her feelings towards himself; but his brother Rex he worshipped. No other word could express the tender, clinging, admiring love which this delicate, almost crippled boy, entertained for the stalwart, hardy manhood of his half-brother. So opposite as they were, too, in character as in appearance. Rex, with his open disregard for books, or anything to do with books; his taste for field sports and all manly occupations; his knowledge of the world and the things of the world. And Gabriel, with his love for learning, his utter inability to join in any of the out-door pleasures suitable to his age, his entire innocence and ignorance of vice. They were a strange couple to be so linked together in the bonds of brotherly love; but if it ever existed, it found its existence there. If Gabriel worshipped Rex, he held in return the warmest, deepest place in his brother's heart, and there was nothing in the world nearly so dear to Rex Reverdon as Gabriel Huntley. And

this was the crowning cause for jealousy to Lady Charlotte. To find, after her years of anxiety for Gabriel's health—after her years of tenderest care for his well-being—that the best part of him was not hers. Worse than that, that it was *his*, who seemed each time to come and step without effort on his own part between her and the affections she had a right to claim as her own. She had viewed Rex's outward prosperity with the greatest envy. I will not dare to say that she had gone so far as to rejoice at the loss of his fortune; but I am sure she had not sympathized on that occasion as a mother ought to have done. Now for months she had been prognosticating his ultimate ruin; not only behind his back, but to his face. Rex remembered it as he proceeded rapidly to the interview which was to inform her that her prognostications had come true, and the thought did not sweeten the prospect before him. As he turned into the lodge gates that led to his mother's house, however, and dismounting from his cab, ordered the groom to take it round to the stables, the scene around him, as he quietly saun-

tered up the carriage drive, seemed to soothe him for the time being, and make his cares sit lighter on him. The season was advanced for the time of year, and the day was bright and sunny, with that soft, balmy air which sometimes comes unexpectedly on spring days, and seems almost by its exhilarating power to lift us out of ourselves and of our troubles, and to make everything appear in a better, happier light. The breath of the lilacs and laburnums seemed overpoweringly sweet as the light air stirred them and shook out their fragrance, and the budding trees were full of singing-birds, and from a little distance he could hear the voices of the children at play, and the bleating of newly-dropt lambs. It was a day on which (if he had had a heart who loved him to lean upon, and a voice who loved him to bid him look up, and be brave for her sake and his own) Rex Reverdon could not have refused to be comforted, even had his trouble been far heavier than it was. Even with no such love awaiting him, the scene around had its influence upon his spirits, and for the moment he had almost forgotten the errand he came on.

But as he came up to the hall door, the sight of the carriage waiting to take Lady Charlotte out driving, brought it all back again to his mind, and his heart sunk. He found his mother in the drawing-room, occupied with visitors; her bonnet and shawl on, ready to go out directly they should leave her at leisure to do so. It was an unfavourable time for his mission. Poor Rex saw his luck was against him again the minute he entered the room. His mother received him with friendly politeness. They met too often to make that a matter of surprise to their friends; but the visitors were better pleased than the hostess at the unexpected entrance of the handsome, fashionable Mr. Reverdon, and showed their pleasure by directing their attention so much towards him that Lady Charlotte found herself almost deserted, which did not put her in a better temper for the coming interview. When her guests at last rose to go, she remained standing, as if her time was so short that it was not worth while resuming her seat. But Rex's business was of too much importance for trifling, and therefore he

had no hesitation in saying, as soon as they were alone,—

“Mother, I won’t detain you longer than I can help ; but I am come on business of the greatest consequence, and therefore I must ask you to sit down and listen to me for a few minutes.”

Lady Charlotte sat down again, but not with the best grace.

“I also have matters of importance to attend to this afternoon, Reginald, and, therefore, I hope you will keep me as short a time as possible.” And she waited in frigid silence for him to commence.

“Mother,” he began, in his honest straightforward manner, twirling his hat round and round in his hands for very nervousness as he proceeded—“Mother, I’ve made a great fool of myself, and I’m ruined.”

The mother did not start, or cry out, or run to him and ask him to unsay his words. She only compressed her thin lips still more together, nodded her head slowly, and said, “Just what I expected of you, Reginald. I have foretold this months ago.”

The young man did not seem to heed her distant manner, but went on hurriedly:—

“I have been getting deeper and deeper into debt every day for the last two years, and I was mad enough to think of extricating myself by a good haul on the Derby, and I lost every penny.”

“Well, what do you intend to do?” demanded Lady Charlotte, quietly.

“I can manage my debts of honour out of the remainder of my principal, though there’s very little of that left; and then I meant to sell up everything in South Street, and that will go far towards settling the remainder, and——”

“How do you mean to live yourself?” said his mother.

“I must go into the army, I suppose; there’s nothing else that I can see.”

“As a private soldier?” asked Lady Charlotte in a sarcastic tone. Her son looked up quickly in her face, but there was that in his which made her eyes drop. Even *she* was ashamed to be detected in a sneer over his frank recital of follies which he regretted. So she

added in a manner which was almost apologetic,—

“I mean, Reginald, that you seem to have forgotten that an officer’s commission costs a great deal of money.”

“I have not forgotten it; and that is the reason—I mean—— it’s no use beating about the bush, mother,” he exclaimed, with a sudden air of resolution; “the long and the short of it is, that I want you to lend me the money for a commission, and that is why I came down here to-day.”

Lady Charlotte had not been prepared for this; it had never been her fate to be applied to for money before by this prosperous elder son of hers, and the request took her by surprise.

“Lend you the money, Reginald! Why you must be crazy! How do you suppose I am to lend you a sum of money like that?”

“It would not be so very much,” he urged; “only a few hundreds. You could lend it easily enough, mother, if you chose; and I’ll pay you every penny of it back again.”

His assertion that she could do it if she chose,

nettled her, because it was so true. She rose from her chair and stood upon the hearthrug, with a look of great determination on her face.

“Whether I *can* lend you a few hundreds or not, Reginald, is *my* business. Whether I choose to do so, or not, is yours: and I do not choose. You were left in more than comfortable circumstances, even after the failure of your fortune, and you have chosen to throw your money away in the most reckless manner. You have behaved in a way which has made us anything but proud that your name should be mixed up with our own. You do not think that your notoriety—your newspaper notoriety, indeed—with a certain person who has made herself famous lately in its pages, was unnoticed in our home circle, I suppose, do you?”

Rex bit his lip, and hung his head, at this mention of one of his past follies; for it was a thing of the past, and he was heartily ashamed of it now.

“That’s an old story, mother,” he observed.

“If it is, it is only one of the many, Reginald. Do you think I should be justified in giving you

money that rightly belongs to my other children, to be wasted, perhaps, in worse than follies like these ?”

“ I did not ask you to *give* it me,” answered her son. “ I only wanted the money as a loan. I should pay it back in time.”

“ How am I to be assured of that ?” demanded her Ladyship.

“ Hang it !” exclaimed Rex, wrathfully, as he, too, rose from his chair and confronted her ; “ I’m a man of honour, mother, if I’m nothing else. Isn’t my word sufficient ? I know you could rake up a lot of old stories against me, if you tried ; for I have lived too much alone, and been too much thrown upon the world for sympathy, to be a saint ; but, anyway, they *are* things of the past. I’ve been living quietly enough lately, and my worst crime has been my folly in attempting to build up a shattered fortune by an uncertain venture. However, I cannot undo it again, or God knows I would, as well as the whole of my past life ; but I can live soberly for the future, and that’s what I mean to do.”

"Necessity is the mother of invention," observed Lady Charlotte, with another of her hard looks.

"Mother, it's no use standing there and saying cutting things. Will you lend me the money, or not?"

"No, Reginald, I cannot do so. As you have made your bed, so you must lie on it; my younger children must not suffer from your extravagance. To repay even a few hundred pounds out of a cornet's, or even captain's pay, you would find an impossibility; you would have barely sufficient to live on yourself. With your expensive habits and very expensive propensities (she added, with another sneer), you would probably have to sell your commission in a couple of months. I am sorry I cannot assist you in any way."

"What do you expect me to do, then?" asked the young man, his eyes flashing as he spoke. "Go to the devil?"

"Really, Reginald," said his mother, "if you are going to stand there, and use such expressions as those, you will force me to close this

interview (and she rang the bell as she spoke). I have pointed out to you the impossibility of my helping you out of your difficulties—"Carriage, John"—to the servant who answered her summons,—and it appears to me that the matter ends there. To appeal to me as to what you must do, is a simple folly. I never remember your asking my advice on any other occasion—when it might have been of more service to you than now."

The young man's hot temper was rising very fast at his mother's indifference, and he could scarcely answer her. But he knew he had no actual claim upon her, and restrained the words which trembled on his lips. She prepared now to leave the room, in order to go to her carriage, and she held out her hand to her son in parting.

"Good-bye, Reginald," she said, and the sound of her voice was as cool as if she was speaking to a mere acquaintance. "When you have settled what you shall do, I shall be glad to hear your plans."

He gave her his hand, but no pressure followed the act. He did not echo her farewell:

he was too angry even to speak ; and, man as he was, when he thought of the relationship between them, and what she might have been to him, something rose in his throat and made him afraid to trust his utterance. When she had gone, he rang the bell violently, and, on its being answered, ordered the servant to bring him something to drink ; and the man presently reappeared with wine.

"Haven't you anything stronger than this?" Mr. Reverdon asked, as he looked contemptuously at the decanter of sherry. "Bring me some brandy."

And when it came at his desire, he emptied the tiny cut-glass bottle which contained it, at one draught, into his tumbler, and drank it, without stopping ; then he caught up his hat and gloves and prepared to seek his cab. "Well, *that* chance is over !" he said to himself, with a kind of half sad, half reckless, laugh. "I must get home as fast as I can, and go in for Number Two. It really becomes quite exciting."

But as he was passing through the hall, a voice called to him from the half-closed library

doors—a voice which he could not resist—and he went in to his brother Gabriel.

“Why, Rex,” said the boy, “you were surely never going to leave the house without seeing me! I thought you would have come down yesterday, and expected you all day—forgetting, stupidly, that it was the famous Derby day, and that of course you were there. Which horse won, Rex?”

“Teddington,” answered his brother. “I think your father might have told you that, Gabriel.”

“My father’s not come home yet,” said the boy, “or I should have asked him, and mamma won’t let a soul open the papers but herself; and she says she has been too busy to-day. Is she gone out, Rex?”

Rex nodded his head.

“Oh! Then we’ll have a jolly time to ourselves for once. Shall we go into the garden, Rex?”

“If you like, my boy!”

Gabriel was sitting in a reclining chair—a chair on wheels—by which, when pushed from behind, he could guide himself anywhere. He was

never out of this chair, poor boy! except when he was in bed, and it had become as familiar to him now as walking and running about had once been.

Rex took a chair himself, and sat down close to Gabriel, and rested his head upon the pillows by the side of his brother's. Then Gabriel said—

"What's the matter, Rex? have you a headache?"

"No, child," was the answer; but so sadly given that Gabriel's thin white hand stole round and laid itself upon the thick masses of his brother's hair.

"Then what's the matter?" he repeated softly.

"I've made a fool of myself, Gabriel," said Rex, looking up, "that's what's the matter; never you do the same when you come to be a man, my boy. I've betted and gambled away my money, till from a rich man I've made myself a poor one. Can you understand that? You won't call me rich brother Rex any more, because I am a great deal poorer than I hope you will

ever be. I shall have to work for my bread now, Gabriel."

The boy burst out laughing.

"I thought you were in earnest, Rex, at first," he said; "now I know that you are only in fun. Work for your bread, whilst your mother and father and brother and sisters have this house, and a carriage and horses, and everything they can want. What nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense, Gabriel; it's sober truth. I lost all my money yesterday on the Derby. I tell you so, that when you grow up you may remember how much it cost me, and never do the same; never bet, or gamble, or drink. They are the three things which ruin a man."

"Dear Rex, don't look so sorry," whispered Gabriel, and his face went fondly up to his brother's, for he was still child enough to kiss him; "is it wicked of me, but I cannot help almost feeling glad when I think of it. You will live with us, brother, now of course; live here always. Oh! what jolly times we shall have—"

But the expression of Rex's face stopped the boy's prophecies of future happiness.

“Shan’t you?” he added, dubiously.

Rex shook his head. “No, Gabriel. I shan’t live here, nor anywhere near here, I think. I don’t know yet what I am going to do; perhaps I may get into the army and go on foreign service—there is no saying.”

“Go on foreign service! Leave England! Oh, Rex!” and Gabriel’s face overclouded with dismay at the tidings, and his eyes filled with tears.

“Don’t be a child, Gabriel,” said Rex, harshly. His words sounded so, but he could not trust himself to contemplate his young brother’s tears, he was too near breaking down himself, when he thought of it. Gabriel looked ashamed of his emotion.

“It was so sudden, Rex; I grow almost like a girl, sitting here in the same place day after day. But you were not in earnest, the last time, were you?” he added, imploringly.

“No, no, of course not,” answered his brother, gaily. “I’m as anxious to stay in England as you are to keep me, Gabriel. Let me wheel you out into the garden, it’s a lovely day.” And so

he commenced pushing the wheeled chair gently across the hall to the back of the house, where a terrace led gradually to the flower garden and shrubbery. It was a beautifully laid-out garden of no modern making, and the fine old trees, which were now only commencing to put forth their buds, afforded in summer a delightful shade from the heat of the sun. As Rex wheeled the invalid boy along the gravelled paths and through the windings of the shrubberies he was assailed on all sides by little voices entreating his notice, and little hands trying to engage him to play. "Brother Reginald, do come and look at our garden." "Brother Reginald, I am waiting to kiss you." "Come and see the new chicken, brother." "Brother, the swan has two little ones." And with him it was—"Ada, my child, don't tread on my toes." "Laury, I can't go to see the little swans to-day." "Mary, you're pulling my beard." "Nurse, take baby off my coat tails;" and the baby, who by the way was a great stout girl of eight years old, was disengaged by main force from her brother's coat, only to be found clinging on again, two

minutes afterwards. It was strange that a man whom his own mother found herself unable to love, should have such powers of fascination over little children. But all Lady Charlotte's endeavours to restrain the inordinate affection of her second brood for their eldest brother had proved perfectly ineffectual. He was still the idol of Laura and Ada and Mary and the others; and the heroes of their nursery games and the good gentlemen in all their stories still faithfully continued to be “exactly like brother Rex you know.”

Gabriel was very silent as his brother wheeled him through the garden that balmy spring day, so silent that Rex noticed it, though only to himself; but as he turned down one of the shrubby paths, and they were alone, he stopped the chair and came round to the front.

“Gabriel, what are you thinking of—of what I said about leaving England?”

And then Gabriel's hand went up to his face, and his tears burst forth and he was sobbing violently—

“Oh, Rex!” he said, though almost inarticu-

lately, "don't think the less of me; I know it's very childish, but I can't help it. I think I should die without you."

It was very childish, but somehow Rex's voice seemed broken too, and he could not answer him. At last he said, but very thickly—

"I won't go, Gabriel—I swear it. I didn't remember when I said so that there was one creature that loved me."

"I love you," said Gabriel fervently, as he took his brother's strong hands in his own weak ones and kissed them again and again—"I love you, Rex, as my life;" and he looked into his face as he spoke. The tones of his voice were so solemn that Rex was powerfully affected.

"God forgive me," he said, "for having forgotten it for a moment; and you forgive me too, Gabriel."

He stooped and kissed his brother on the forehead as he spoke, and they were very quiet for a few minutes; then Rex said, looking at his watch—

"Gabriel, I must be off; I have an engagement this evening in town. But I will run over

to-morrow again," he added, in answer to the disappointment in the boy's face at his words.

He wheeled the chair back into the house and then walked rapidly away and flung himself into his cab.

"I forgot Gabriel," was his thought as he drove homewards. "I believe the child would have broken his heart if I had left England. Perhaps it is all for the best No. 1 has failed. I can't say I like the alternative; but beggars mustn't be choosers, and that proverb comes home rather bitterly in my case. So now for No. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

ISOBEL FANE.

“FANNY, these children have been in my room again to-day, turning everything topsy-turvy. It really is *too* provoking. I will not stand it any longer.”

The voice was that of Miss Fane, and the tones were raised, and decidedly energetic. By her side stood two or three children of the most troublesome ages, looking very like culprits caught in the act.

“I only turned my back for a moment,” she went on to say, “and they have upset the ink again, and thrown my papers all over the floor. I really think you might try to control them a little better. The whole comfort of the house is destroyed by their unruliness. What is the use of a nursery if they are not kept in it?”

The colour of the speaker was heightened, and

her lip trembled as she spoke. It must certainly have been very annoying. All the neatness of her pretty room destroyed and her little belongings disarranged by a parcel of mischievous, disobedient nephews and nieces. The lady she addressed seemed to take the matter very quietly. She stood leaning against the sill of the open door, without the least change in her apathetic features, as she listened to her sister's complaints. She was a woman of perhaps five and thirty, very pretty, very faded, and an evident slattern. As her imperturbable countenance met the other's excited gaze, Isobel Fane's temper was disposed to rise very high. But she controlled herself, and merely said—

"Don't you intend to speak to them, Fanny? Are they to be allowed to disobey day after day, without even a reproof?"

Then Mrs. Peyton said languidly—

"Horace and Emma, you are very naughty children to come into your aunt's room, and bring Fanny with you. Where's Ann? Why don't you go and play in the nursery with baby and Freddy?"

The first question only was answered by the eldest boy and girl, who shouted at her in return, and both at once—

“Ann’s gone out, mamma, with baby, and Freddy’s in the kitchen with nurse.”

“Oh, is Ann gone out?” remarked Mrs. Peyton, fretfully. “I never told her to do so, and I wonder what nurse is doing in the kitchen. I wish she would keep to her nursery. It’s no use telling those servants to do anything; they will have their own way.”

Miss Fane’s lip curled visibly.

“Of course they will,” she remarked, “if you take no pains to secure yours. However, I wish you would be kind enough now to order your children to go back to their nursery, for I am very busy this morning.”

“What a fuss you make about nothing, Isobel,” said her sister. “Children, go upstairs, and mind you don’t come down again till I give you leave.” And then (as the young ones slowly and reluctantly disappeared up one flight of stairs, where they remained stationary, hanging over the balustrades) she added, “I

really don't see that your papers are of so much consequence as all that. You are not obliged to write them, or translate them, or whatever it is."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Miss Fane, quietly; "but my room is my own, and I wish it to be considered private. It is a great nuisance that I cannot keep it so without having to lock the door after me every time I go out or in."

And then having re-collected the scattered papers, books, and pens, and wiped up the spilt ink, Miss Fane settled herself again at her table, and looked as if she was about to resume her employment. But Mrs. Peyton still lingered about the door.

"Do you want anything more with me, Fanny?" asked her sister, presently looking up from her writing.

"The boys' bills for last half have come in for the second time," said Mrs. Peyton, leaving the doorway, and advancing to the table, as she placed two formidable-looking pieces of paper in point of size upon it. "They were sent to me at Easter, but I forgot to tell

you of them. I think they had better be paid now."

Isobel Fane looked annoyed as she laid down her paper again.

"Of course they had," she said. "Why didn't you tell me of them before, Fanny? You should never leave school bills unpaid, for the credit of the family. They seem very long ones this time," she added, as she ran her eye over the items.

"Are they?" said her sister, indifferently. "The tailor's bills are included, I suppose?"

"Yes, so they always have been; but allowing for that, they are nearly half as much again as they were last year."

"Well," drawled Mrs. Peyton, "Robert is quite growing up you know, Isobel; and Charles and Tom are a good size. I suppose they begin to think of being in the fashion now."

"In the fashion!" repeated Miss Fane; "when the eldest is fifteen. What nonsense, Fanny! Don't encourage such folly. If Robert has gone in the fashion, he must go out again.

They cannot require so many suits at school. It is quite unnecessary."

She might have added, "Particularly when it is paid for with another person's money;" but Isobel Fane could be generous, and ignore the virtue.

"Well, I think you are very hard upon the poor boys," whined her sister. "I am sure I shouldn't like to speak to Robert on such a subject. It would annoy him very much."

"Oh! I'll speak to him myself," said Isobel, "and brave his annoyance into the bargain, Fanny. I would much rather send Horace to school with his brothers than spend the money on extra coats and trousers for Master Bob."

Mrs. Peyton sunk down upon a chair; her naturally pretty figure hidden by her untidy mode of dressing, her hair hastily arranged, if arranged at all, half falling over her shoulders, as she tried very hard to get up something between a cry and the whimper which the "put-upon" assume.

"I believe you would like to see me turn all my children out of the house, Isobel," she said.

“I don’t believe you’d care if we were all dead.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Fanny,” said her sister, sharply. She was not sharp by nature; she had been made so by seeing for so many years this miserable daily exhibition of folly and weakness and want of energy.

“A note, please, ma’am; no answer.”

The servant had come in unexpectedly, and was as quickly gone, as she laid the three-cornered missive on the table. The sight roused Mrs. Peyton; she forgot all about the hardness of her sister, and awoke to a fresh cause for complaint.

“A refusal, of course,” she said, as she seized the note. “It’s always the way when I give a party—all the best people refuse. I’m sure it’s from Mr. Reverdon. And, oh! Isobel,” she added, as she stood with the note unopened in her hand, “there’s nothing done about the supper yet, and no flowers; and if I’m to wear that blue silk, it must be mended where I tore it at Mrs. Grouse’s last week.”

“All right, never mind,” said her sister,

impatiently. “I’ll see to all that; who is your note from?”

“I’m sure nothing will be ready in time,” urged Mrs. Peyton, whilst she slowly unfolded the note paper. “Ah, well! I thought he wouldn’t come; it’s always the way with young men—an excuse, of course.”

Isobel Fane felt as if the morning had turned suddenly cold.

“We can do very well without him,” was all she observed.

“How *can* we do very well without him?” repeated her sister, in quite an excited tone for her, “when you know that he was the only man coming who can sing.”

“Sing?” demanded Miss Fane. “When did he sing?”

“Not Mr. Fairfield?”

“I thought you said the note was from Mr. Reverdon.”

“No, I never did,” answered Mrs. Peyton, peevishly. “I’d rather Mr. Reverdon stayed away a hundred times. He’s no use, except to look at. But I had set my heart upon

Mr. Fairfield. It's always the way in this world."

Isobel Fane felt as if the morning was too hot to be bearable. She bent over her paper, and the colour flew to her face; but her sister noticed nothing of the change in her countenance.

"Well, are you going to help me, Isobel, or not?" she asked, presently, as she prepared to leave the room. "I thought you said you'd see to the supper-table being laid; and I have no one to go to Covent Garden for the flowers for the *épergnes*."

"I'll help you willingly, Fanny, by-and-bye; but surely there is no necessity for worrying yourself about it now. It is only half-past eleven. When I have finished this translation, which I must take to Miss Burnett to-day, I will go round by Covent Garden and choose the flowers. As for the supper being laid, you have the waiters coming at six, they can do all that, surely, without my help. And tell nurse to go back to the nursery and do your dress at once. You have plenty

of servants, if you only knew how to manage them."

"But nurse is so stupid about trimmings; she has no taste."

"Well, send my maid here, and I'll tell her to do it for you. You can surely explain to her yourself how you wish the dress trimmed."

"I'm sure I've no idea now what we settled about it," answered Mrs. Peyton, with her most vacant expression. "I wish *you* could have done it, Isobel; you can sit here, day after day, doing translations for a person who can do them very well for herself, but anything for your sister becomes a trouble, of course,—or you have no time. All that writing is not in the least necessary, and very little good, that I can see."

The cold expression returned to Miss Fane's face.

"That is my business, I think, Fanny," was all she answered. "I wish you would leave me to myself at present. I will see to your arrangements afterwards."

When she was left alone again she recommenced writing, though her countenance still bore the expression of annoyance which had come over it at her sister's last words. The work she was engaged upon was the translation of some trivial English romance into French, intended for the benefit of some foreign journal or newspaper. In general, she was a free translator, being thoroughly acquainted with both languages, but to-day her pen went very slowly, and several times she stopped altogether, and gazed fixedly at the pattern on the carpet beneath her feet, as if she was looking there for the solution of the words she was about to transcribe. The sentence she had come to was as follows:—

“Love is of no age, no clime, no disposition. The nature that feels it need not of necessity be young, the one who inspires it beautiful. As the atmosphere invisibly surrounds the earth, yet is felt by all, so love, unseen, pervades every breast, though its temperature varies according to the heart that gives it birth.”

The sentence was easy enough, there was

nothing in it that could puzzle her, yet she had only written the first word, "L'amour," and there she stayed.

"'No age, no clime, no disposition.' What a fool I am," she thought to herself, "to feel such an interest about that boy." (The last word was given with quite a touch of rancour in its expression.) "What is it to me if he comes—or doesn't come? At *my* age, too!"

As the thought struck her she pushed aside her writing materials, and walked through the folding doors, which divided the apartments, into her bedroom. A large cheval glass stood just opposite to her as she entered; she went straight up to it, and looked at her own reflection for a few minutes in silence.

"I wonder if I look thirty?" she soliloquized. "People see themselves with such different eyes to what strangers do. I wish I knew just what I appear to the world."

Whatever she appeared to the world, the reflection in her looking-glass was anything but an unpleasant one.

Did she look her age? Yes, quite. I am

aware that I am doing a very bold thing in asking your interest on behalf of a heroine past seventeen, but I cannot alter facts, and Isobel Fane was really thirty years old. Of the middle height of woman, her figure moulded with a perfected grace that no figure of seventeen ever yet possessed, with a slender throat, a firm, rounded bust, small waist, and delicate hands and feet, she might, so far, have stood for a model of a woman. Beyond this there was nothing strikingly handsome about her. She had a great deal of dark hair, which was all plainly taken back from her small head, and dressed in a large knot low on her neck behind; a fair, colourless skin, calm, sensible blue eyes, with dark lashes, and a tolerable set of features. But yet she was a remarkable-looking woman, remarkably clever, remarkably refined. Whatever she discovered from trying to see herself as the world saw her, the discovery did not seem to please her. The tears rose in her eyes as she gazed at her own reflection, and she turned away hastily, and threw herself down on a little couch which stood near.

“I look it fully,” she said to herself impatiently, “I believe I look forty; no wonder considering the worry that I’ve had for the last ten years; and he—he is a mere boy to me.”—And then she jumped up again and walked to the dressing-table and smoothed her smooth glossy hair, and as she did so she laughed, just to make herself believe that she didn’t care. “What folly this is!” she said, half aloud. “I really don’t know what’s come to me. I believe I’m going mad. I thought I had done with this sort of thing years ago.”

And she gave a little sigh to the remembrance of a grave at Ventnor, and of the weary time that followed the closing of it. Women are strange creatures. They can give a sigh to the memory of a lost lover, even at the time they acknowledge they have all they wish for in this world in the possession of a new one. And this Isobel Fane was not yet ready to acknowledge. And so the sigh she gave was genuine, and when she pressed her hand over her heart at the same time, she really thought that she still regretted that consumptive clergyman, and

would have chosen him yet (if it were possible) before the living glorious type of manhood, which was filling her heart, almost unconsciously to herself, in the image of Rex Reverdon.

“Poor Harold!” she said, softly. To have dreamt of another even was an injury, in her estimation, to the dead man, even though he had been buried for eight years at least.

Long after a woman has really recovered from a grief she clings to the idea that she still mourns, and is unwilling to part with it, and convince herself that she is cured. And so Isobel Fane put on quite a pretty little expression of melancholy as she said “Poor Harold!” and did not indulge herself with any more thoughts of the “boy” nor say that she was “mad,” but went back to her translation, and mastered the passage on love, without even giving herself time to pause and think, that if love cannot grow old, her own feelings might not be quite dead even at the mature age of thirty years.

They were orphans — these two sisters — orphans, and almost alone. Some years pre-

viously, nearly as far back as the date of Isobel's birth, a clergyman had been left widower, and all but heart-broken, in his far-off living away in Wales, with three little children to bring up and provide for—Fanny, Isobel and Charles. The death of his wife left the Rev. Charles Fane bereft of all interest in his life, almost in his children. He had refused to bear the dispensation of the Almighty like a man or a Christian. He had weakly succumbed to his grief, and nursed it, and cherished it, and allowed his sinful indulgence to militate against the welfare of his neglected family. He imagined he was paying, by this means, a great compliment to the memory of the departed: that he was a martyr; that he had more to bear than anybody else in the world; and so he was selfish to his heart's content, and his children ran wild. When Isobel's godmother, a certain Miss Murray, after whom she had been called, offered to take her godchild and adopt her entirely, the indifferent father accepted the offer at once, and from five years of age Isobel knew no home but that of her godmother. Here she had every

attention lavished on her as long as she was a child, and every advantage of education so soon as she was capable of profiting by them.

Isobel Fane was that very rare thing, a really well-educated woman. She had first been thoroughly grounded in all the more solid branches of learning, and then had added to them every accomplishment of which she was capable. She was naturally clever, but she was also naturally gay, so that her education showed itself more by her clear judgment and the quickness with which she grasped the meaning of any subject which was presented to her, than by any disposition to hard study or love of the abstruse. She had had sufficient sense to drop by degrees those accomplishments for which she had no taste, and the only one which she now pursued with any ardour was that of painting. For languages she had always had a great inclination, and was mistress of several. At eighteen, Miss Murray had presented her to the world, an accomplished graceful girl. At twenty she had found herself living in her sister's house—her benefactress dead—herself in possession of all

her fortune, which amounted, as has been said before, to fifteen hundred a year.

In the meanwhile, her father had died, but not before he had married his daughter Fanny, at a very youthful age, to the first man who offered to take her off his hands, and who happened to be Mr. Peyton, a young barrister, who had little to look to except what he earned; but who was too much fascinated by the pretty face of Fanny Fane to resist matrimony when it was so readily sanctioned. Then disagreements at home arose between the father and son, relative to the latter's future profession, which ended by Charlie taking the law into his own hands, and running off to sea, which service he had subsequently cut, and had roved about America, living anywhere and anyhow. And then the selfish father died; and I cannot help thinking was a good riddance. And Isobel was left protectorless, which was not half so fortunate, and came to live at No. 15, Torrington Square, and to be subjected to a great deal of annoyance and to bear a great deal of jealousy, because she was an heiress, and independent.

And yet the Peytons had reason to rejoice at the fact. They profited not a little by Miss Murray's money and Isobel's generosity. Hitherto they had scarcely lived. Mr. Peyton's income, as derived from his profession, was purely nominal: if it had not been for a very diminutive annual allowance, which some father or grandfather or uncle of his made them, they could scarcely have all survived it. As it was, every year had brought an infant with it, until some ten or eleven, made the house in Torrington Square overflow. An unmarried sister with fifteen hundred a year, was not to be despised as a permanent visitor. And generously Isobel discharged the debt she owed them. A marked change took place in No. 15, Torrington Square, after she came to settle down there. The faded druggets were replaced with new carpets. The drawing and bed-room furniture increased and multiplied, and put on new attire till it scarcely knew itself. The children went to school, (Isobel often thought that no part of her money afforded her so much satisfaction as that with which she paid the school-bills,) and every

luxury the house contained came from her ready purse. At the time of the consumptive clergyman's reign, the Peytons had sustained a great fright.

The idea of Isobel marrying, and going away from them (fifteen hundred a year included) was anything but palatable. I am afraid they were not sorry when that summons came from Ventnor, for the girl he loved to go down and see him once more before he died. I am afraid they did not regret the quenching of that young life, the closing of all those bright hopes, as they ought to have done. For it was a great grief to Isobel, and they might have sympathized with her. She was very young at the time, hardly past her coming of age, and she had been looking forward to a long life of happiness with her lover, who must have been a good fellow, or she would not have loved him. Doubtless it was all for the best; he might have been a peevish invalid all his life, and turned this bright woman into a nurse, without the pay; or she might have wearied of him, who knows? Perhaps if you and I had fulfilled the first romance

we dreamt of, when our years were few, and we little thought the hopes we cherished would never come to pass—that romance which still appears so tender in the retrospect, so desirable (because unfulfilled)—we might not have been so contented as we are. Love's young dream is so apt to turn out all a mistake. But we don't think so, or we won't think so at the time. Isobel Fane didn't think so, when her consumptive lover died at Ventnor. She imagined she was desolate for ever. She went back to Torrington Square and shut herself up for months. She refused to spend her own money; she abhorred the sight of it, since it could not save him. When the first trouble had passed and she began to look about her again, she found that her brother and sister had taken care that her purse should not lie idle. From that time she was periodically called on to pay for many luxuries, the use of which had been commenced during her months of apathy and indifference to outward things, but which were never given up afterwards. She had paid for all these things now for so long, that it was looked on quite as

a matter of course that she should do so—too much a matter of course she sometimes thought ; but still she paid cheerfully, only wishing that money had power to procure quiet and regularity and order in that most unruly and ill-managed household. Whether from natural indolence, or from the first years of her married life having been spent in a round of poverty and ill-health, Fanny Peyton seemed to have grown perfectly incapable of keeping anything like order in her house or family. Her children were disobedient and unmanageable, her servants uncontrolled, her husband ill-tempered, and herself always complaining. And the whole brunt of the mismanagement—the children’s naughtiness, servants’ shortcomings, husband’s harshness, and wife’s grumblings—seemed to fall upon the devoted head of Isobel Fane. If she did not actually encounter all these evils, she got them second hand from her sister. If her money could cure them, well and good ; quiet reigned for a few hours : but if not, no other steps were taken to remedy the ill. Isobel had furnished a couple of rooms for herself with her usual good

taste, and these she tried to keep private ; you have seen with what success. Here she had lived for ten long years, her routine of life little diversified, except by gaiety, and gaiety was a thing she did not care for. She had never mentioned the subject of marriage since the death of her first lover, and the Peytons had given up the idea that she would ever do so, and considered themselves secure of her for life. Of course she had had offers—what woman would not, with a comfortable income of her own—but she had never dreamt of accepting one for a moment. She never intended marrying. She said so openly, and so she thought. The translations her sister reviled her with employing herself upon were not done on her own account. Whilst she had lived with her god-mother, a Miss Burnett had been her governess for several years, and Miss Burnett had fallen into ill-health, and became unable to fill her situation, and was living in humble lodgings in London, and supported herself by translating and compiling articles for the various periodicals and reviews, being an accomplished woman, as

her pupil testified. Isobel had a most affectionate heart. She would have poured out half the contents of her purse, if her old governess would have accepted it from her; but she knew Miss Burnett too well to offer it even. But as the old lady got more offers of employment than she could well fulfil, and the payment for working your brain in this world is not quite so lucrative as that for using your hands or showing your legs, her pupil had commenced by assisting her a little occasionally, until she had ended by assisting her a great deal at all times. When Miss Burnett remonstrated with her on the trouble she was giving herself, Isobel would laugh, and say it was only refunding what she had already received from her governess. And the occupation had really become an enjoyment to her, and she would have greatly missed it if she had given it up. It was self-imposed, but it was continuous and healthful, and kept her from brooding over herself. She translated now as regularly as Miss Burnett did, and by that means nearly doubled her old friend's income.

And Rex Reverdon, the "boy," how had he come to interest her?

Simply by seeing him often. The Peytons were not averse to paying off their debts of hospitality at their sister's expense, consequently the house in Torrington Square was often lighted up. Isobel seconded the motion. She liked the excitement, the diversion to their daily life. She could not have borne to go out herself to others' houses, and know that it would not be so in return. Mr. Halkett had known Mr. Peyton for some years: it was through his means that Rex Reverdon had been introduced to them about a twelvemonth before. From the first, Isobel Fane had acknowledged that this young Saxon-looking gentleman, with his yellow beard and blue eyes, had possessed an interest for her. She had looked at him first in an artistic point of view. She thought he would make a splendid model for a "Cœur de Lion," in a few years, or for anything else that was intended to be fair and frank and manly. By-and-bye she caught herself looking at him, with no particular view to art, and was angry in her own heart for

doing so. Indeed, anger was the only point she had ever yet allowed herself to attain with respect to him. Whenever she thought of him she was angry, and yet she went on thinking. If Isobel had imagined others had noticed her preference, she would have denied the feeling altogether. And yet it must have been noticed, else why did Mr. Halkett mention the fact to his friend, and startle him with the new idea presented to him. Perhaps Isobel Fane was not positively "in love" with Rex Reverdon, but she stood on dangerous ground with respect to him—dangerous, that is to say, if he began to woo her. She cared for him quite sufficiently to believe him readily. She cared for him——. Well, you will see before long how much she cared for him, and you will believe it too, notwithstanding the sigh which accompanied the words she uttered as she gazed at herself in the looking-glass.

CHAPTER VII.

A MEETING IN COVENT GARDEN.

ONE o'clock struck, and she was still busily engaged at her translation, but it was nearly finished, and as presently a loud gong sent its discordant tones reverberating all over the house, she hastily scratched off the concluding lines, and arranging her hair and dress afresh, ran down to the dining-room floor.

"Where is Mrs. Peyton?" she asked of the servant in attendance, as she entered the apartment, to find the luncheon in readiness, and five children seated round the table, waiting for their dinner, but no one visible to preside over them.

"In her room, Miss."

"Have you told her luncheon is waiting?"

"Yes, Miss ; but Mrs. Peyton is not ready. She wishes you to go on without her."

With a sigh of impatience, Isobel set herself to her task. She knew well from bitter experience, what “going on” without her sister meant,—attending to the wants and settling the disputes of a family of quarrelsome young cormorants, while she got no luncheon herself.

“Why doesn’t Master Horace begin his dinner?” she asked presently, when she had served mutton all round, and had time to look about her.

“He won’t eat it, if you please, Miss. He says he wants the stew.”

“You can’t have stew, Horace; eat your dinner directly, like a good boy.”

But Horace didn’t seem to see things in the same light, he thrust out his hands towards the dish he coveted, and drawing it carelessly in his own direction, upset half of it on the table and half on his sister Emma, who sat next him.

“You’re a very naughty child, Master Horace,” exclaimed the servant, rushing to the rescue.

“It was her!” retorted Horace without the

least respect for grammar, as he turned and pitched into his little sister.

“Oh ! aunt Bell, Horace has pinched me so !” succeeded by a loud roar.

“I didn’t ; it’s a lie,” vehemently from the accused.

“Come here at once, Sir,” began Isobel.

“I shan’t.”

“Aunt Bell, I want potatoes.”

“He’s hurt me so dreadfully, aunt Bell.”

“I’ll tell mamma of you, Miss.”

And then the water jug upset all over the table by the youngest of the party—aged two and a half.

“Oh, where *is* Mrs. Peyton ?” exclaimed Isobel in despair, as the tumult seemed to increase every minute, and the unruly little horde paid not the least attention, however much she screamed at them. “Is she never coming, Mary ?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Miss ; I told mistress ever so many times as luncheon was ready, but she was lying down till the very last.”

“Where’s the nurse then ?”

"She's having her dinner, Miss."

"Well tell her she must leave it till afterwards, and come to the children instead. They are beyond me. Take that knife from Miss Fanny; and, children, what do you mean by getting up from your chairs like that? You must sit still till dinner is over."

She leant her head against her hand, and was silent till the nurse appeared. Her quiet awed the children; they thought something was wrong, and they were frightened. Soon the nursery potentate was busy amongst them; slapping the back of one, setting another down in its high chair with a good bump of authority, rating all loudly for their unruliness, which had disturbed her in the middle of her own comfortable meal. When order was restored, Isobel rose slowly to leave the room.

"Call me a cab, Mary, please," she said; for a carriage was a luxury the Peytons had not yet had the assurance to start on her credit, and she had never wished to start it on her own.

"Lor, Miss! you are never going out without a bit of luncheon," said the maid in horror

at the proceeding, "and you had next to no breakfast this morning. Do sit down again, and have something before you start."

Isobel walked back to the table and hastily swallowed a glass of wine.

"I couldn't eat," she said, in apology. "Those children are enough to take away any one's appetite. I shall be ready in ten minutes, Mary;" and she went upstairs as she spoke.

"You're a set of naughty, tiresome, disobedient children," exclaimed Mary, addressing the entire posse of young Peytons in one breath, and with a determined stress on all her adjectives, "and if I was your ma, I'd whip you all round, that I would, to go and put your poor aunt off her lunch in that way; it's enough to make one shake you well, that it is."

And the expression of feeling was genuine, for Isobel Fane was first favourite, par excellence, in the lower regions of 15, Torrington Square. As she climbed the long flight of stairs, for which town houses are so famous, she did so wearily. Her mind was wearied, not her body. It was no new feeling, her life was

made up of it. After she had dressed herself in her walking things, she tapped at her sister's bed-room door, before she descended the stairs again. Fanny's voice, evidently flurried—she always was flurried if there was anything to do—answered to the same.

“What! not ready yet?” was Isobel's remark, as she entered and saw her sister with a very heated face, struggling to get into her dress. “Luncheon has been on the table for half-an-hour; I suppose the children have nearly finished by this time.”

“Have you left them, Isobel?” demanded Mrs. Peyton, in an injured tone.

“Yes, with nurse,” answered her sister carelessly; “they are beyond me, I have often told you so, Fanny. I am going out now. What sort of flowers do you want at Covent Garden?”

“Oh! any sort that will look well in the *épergnes*. You are not going alone, Isobel, are you?”

“Who am I to go with?” she rejoined.

“It seems so strange,—a girl going about London alone.”

“I’m not a girl,” said Isobel ; “and if I were, I’m going in a cab. Miss Burnett will come with me to Covent Garden I dare say.”

“I hope you’re not going to stay out all the afternoon, and leave me to see after everything by myself.”

“I will be back as soon as I can, Fanny ; but of necessity it cannot be very soon. Didn’t you ask me this morning to go and see if Mdlle. Colzatti can come and sing to-night ? and then there’s the box for the Opera to be got from Cramer’s for to-morrow.”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Peyton, with a sigh of martyrdom. “I suppose, as usual, everything will fall upon me. I shan’t have time to get my luncheon as it is.”

Isobel might have retorted : “Thanks to your children, no more shall I.” But she called out, “Good-bye, then, till we meet,” instead, and ran lightly down the staircase to the hall.

The cab was waiting for her at the door.

“Where to, Miss ?” She gave the address,—not a high-sounding one ; but Miss Burnett could have ill afforded a better situation. She

was obliged to be content with a couple of furnished rooms in a small street leading out of a quiet square somewhere at the top of Oxford Street. But though the surroundings were so humble, there was little doubt that the person who welcomed Isobel so warmly as she ran up those narrow stairs was as much a lady as herself. She was a little woman of perhaps fifty—perhaps more, with a kind, benevolent face, and genuine, womanly eyes, which accorded well with the grey hair in quiet bands, which shaded them. She came out on the little landing to meet her visitor, and took her in her arms and kissed her.

“My dear child,” she said, “I thought you would come to-day.”

Her pupil was a child to her still, though womanhood had crept upon her for so many years.

“Of course you did,” rejoined Isobel, gaily, as she entered the sitting-room, and laid her roll of MS. upon the table. “Why, to-morrow is press-day, isn’t it, and how would the editor look if my contributions were not forthcoming.

Who chose that story, Miss Burnett? It's very poor; it will never take."

"The editor, my dear,—at least I believe so. Has it been troublesome to you?"

"No; but I hope the last part is all right. You must look over it, Miss Burnett. I was hurried this morning. Fanny has a party to-night, and the house is, of course, out of windows."

"Hurried or worried, Isobel?" asked Miss Burnett, quietly.

Isobel looked up quickly.

"Worried! What should *I* have to worry me?"

"My *dear* 'child." Miss Burnett said the words rather sadly, and she laid her hand upon Isobel's head, from which the bonnet had been removed. As she spoke, something in the touch, the action, and the tone of her voice struck the younger woman's heart, and she burst into tears.

Suddenly, without other warning, into a hail-storm of grief, which passed as quickly as it came, leaving no trace behind it except a bright

heated patch of red on either cheek. Before her governess had time to question or remark, Isobel Fane jumped up from the chair on which she sat, and was herself again.

"Now, old lady," she said, as she assumed an air of nonchalance, and tied on her bonnet again before the glass, as if she were afraid to continue a tête-à-tête any longer, "are you coming out with me or not? because I can't stop here all the afternoon. I have a dozen places to go to, winding up with Covent Garden, and I want your company. Get on your bonnet, there's a dear old thing, and let's be going."

"But, Isobel, my love——"

"Don't ask your love anything, for *God's* sake," she added, in a tone of greater earnestness. "She is the child you call her, or she would behave herself more like a sensible woman. Can you come or not?"

"Of course I can, my dear. Only too glad to be of use to you." And Miss Burnett sought her bedroom without venturing another remark upon the behaviour of her old pupil.

The commissions were accomplished, the signora was disengaged, and would be charmed, on condition of an amicable exchange in the shape of pounds, shillings, and pence, to make one of the guests at Mrs. Peyton's that evening, and consent to sing not more than three times during the festivities, and one of the best boxes in the royal tier of Her Majesty's Theatre had fortunately remained on hand until Miss Fane secured it. So far, so good, and then the order was given for Covent Garden Market.

"We shall be lucky if we succeed as well in this commission as we have in the others," was Isobel's remark to her friend, as she looked at her watch. "Half-past five; I had no idea we had been so long at Mdle. Colzatti's. All the best flowers will be gone."

The season was advanced for the time of year, and yet it was already dusk under the market arcade, and the lamps lighted in several of the windows, as the two ladies descended from the cab to walk to the shop they usually employed. Isobel was busily engaged in the back part of the shop, whilst Miss Burnett only stood by her

side, and listened as she discussed the advisability of having this flower, or the feasibility of obtaining the other, and contrasted the merits of the different-hued foliage with which they were to be backed up with the young woman in attendance, and of whom she was an old customer. She was just commenting upon the number of flowers that she wanted, and the high price they were at that early season, when a gentleman hastily came into the shop—a large, well-dressed man—unknown to Miss Burnett—well-known to Isobel Fane. It was Rex Reverdon. Isobel's tell-tale tongue stopped its chatter at once as she recognized the outline of his figure, as he advanced beneath the flaming jet of gas—his features. He was apparently in a great hurry, for he spoke rapidly, and in an authoritative tone, "Make me up a bouquet at once, please. I can't wait long."

"What kind, Sir?" demanded the girl behind the counter—a pretty young Jewess with most seductive eyes.

"I don't know. The handsomest you can. What flowers have you?"

“Stephanotis—moss-roses—Cape jessamine—geraniums—” and the girl ran over a list of hot-house flowers which she had declared to Isobel a minute before were unprocurable for love or money.

“I don’t care what it’s made of,” was Rex’s answer, and in no quiet tones, “so long as it is good. I want the best you can give me.”

The words struck on one of his hearer’s hearts like a chill. She wondered who it was for, since he seemed so anxious about its perfections.

“We had better get home, my dear, had we not?” asked the quiet voice of Miss Burnett, as she saw that Isobel’s purchases were completed.

“Oh, no ! not yet, wait a minute,” said the other, in a low voice of excitement. “Let that gentleman finish his business first.”

She dreaded attracting his notice in passing out ; she always did dread meeting him or speaking to him, either in public or private. Now she drew further back into the dark portion of the shop, and listened breathlessly to the

tones of his voice, whilst Miss Burnett acquiesced in her desire, without guessing its motive. The pretty Jewess was not disposed to lose time, whilst she held her foundation of moss and myrtle downwards, and inserted the wire-strung flowers from underneath, turning the bouquet round every minute, to judge of the effect she was producing. She was very busy—other customers were waiting to be attended to—but not too busy to turn her dark eyes occasionally upon the gentleman she was serving with a glance that was intended to be very killing. But her looks were lost upon Rex; he leant against the counter waiting for his bouquet with his eyes upon the ground, or anywhere but directed towards his fair servitor.

“This will be a guinea one,” she said, presently. “I suppose you know that.”

“I don’t care if it’s two guineas,” returned Rex, shortly, “as long as I have it quickly.”

“Are you in such a *great* hurry,” she asked, “to get away?”

Eyes again; but he saw them no more than before.

“Yes, I am rather,” he pleaded; “got an engagement.”

“A *very* particular one?” demanded the girl.

He became aware now that she wanted a quiet flirtation with him, and he looked up accordingly. He was not very good at withstanding temptation of this sort. But the pretty Jewess over-reached herself in her next words. The bouquet was completed now, and she was putting it up in its paper. But before she handed it across the counter to him, she said with an arch smile—

“Now, before you have it, you must tell me who it is for?”

Rex Reverdon’s face changed directly at this piece of impertinence. Had he been alone in the shop, he would probably have laughed it off, considering the lips that uttered it, but he had distinguished the figures of ladies standing in the background, and he was nettled at this quiet impudence before strangers. He took the flowers, and prepared to leave the shop.

“That is my business, and not yours,” was his curt answer as he did so.

“What a shame!” said the girl, laughing, to one of her companions as he disappeared; “something’s put him out to-night.” And then to Miss Fane, “Are your flowers not packed yet, Miss? I’ll send them to the carriage at once, if you like to go forward.”

As Isobel Fane left the shop door, she could just discern, at the entrance of the Arcade, Reverdon giving the flowers to his groom to hold as he jumped into the cab, and took the reins from him. And then he dashed off towards his house, having made this little *détour* on his way from Wimbledon in order to procure his bouquet.

They sat in the cab for some minutes before the flowers arrived and were stowed away. Isobel was very silent during that time. She could not help wondering *who* that bouquet was for that he need have been so very particular. She supposed he was paying attention to some girl or other—perhaps engaged to some one; nothing more likely, with his face and his wealth. Isobel Fane was not in love with him; but one of those pangs of female jealousy, which so little

will give birth to, but which are so bitter to bear, rose up in her heart, and felt like a very good imitation of the master passion. As they were driving towards Torrington Square, Miss Burnett's curiosity could keep asleep no longer.

"What is the matter, my dear Isobel?" she said. "Are you not well?"

"Quite well, Miss Burnett."

"Why are you so silent, then?"

"I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Of many things," answered Isobel, and truly, "one—that I am tired, and don't feel very much inclined to dress for a party directly I get home."

"Is your party to be a large one?"

"Yes, rather."

Miss Burnett saw it was useless hoping for more than mere answers to her questions, and so she came to the point at once.

"Isobel, how are you all getting on at home now?"

Miss Fane had been seated at the opposite side of the cab to her friend, but she changed

her position at these words, and placed herself next to her.

"Much the same as usual," she said, as she took Miss Burnett's hand in hers, and pressed it affectionately.

"No better?"

"No; how should we? The Lord of Misrule still reigns paramount. Fanny seems incapable of altering the state of things, and Frederick indifferent. The three boys are coming home next month, when the house will be worse than ever I expect. I wish I was well out of it."

"I wish you were, my dear," echoed her friend.

"Now if Charlie had only stayed in England instead of running off in that mad manner, or stuck to his profession when he had chosen it," resumed Isobel, after a pause, "I might have kept his house for him, and I should have liked that. Poor dear Charlie!"

"Have you heard from him, Isobel?"

"No," she answered, sadly; "not a word. It is two years now since he wrote to us. Perhaps he is dead, or married, and forgotten all about us."

“I wish you were married, Isobel.”

“Do you, dear? I don’t.”

“Do you never mean to do so?”

“*Never!*”

Miss Burnett quite jumped at the force which Isobel threw into the last word, and could not forget it afterwards.

“I wonder what’s the matter with the dear girl,” she thought to herself, as the cab, having deposited Isobel in Torrington Square, was ordered to take her back to her own lodgings; “she is certainly altered lately: less cheerful and hopeful, more silent and uncommunicative. She can’t be thinking of that dead man still! Eight years ago! It seems very improbable—and yet, she is a woman.” And Miss Burnett fell to thinking of a certain far-away yet forgotten romance in her own life—a hope which had been set and sprung up, and even blossomed, but which had withered before it came to flower. She had not replaced it by another hope; she had loved the dead thing better than a hundred living ones! Her pupil’s heart might be made of the same materials as her own. The

thought of it made her lonely evening still more sad and lonely than it need have been.

In the meanwhile, Isobel had entered her home again (so miscalled, where the heart has no quiet refuge to lean upon), and found it in greater confusion than ever. The hall was full of the furniture of the dining-room, which had been turned out to make room for the supper. Servants were running here and there, doing things in their own fashion, half of which had to be undone again, because there was no ruling mind to give them the proper directions; and, above all, rose the confusion of dinner being carried upstairs in some back room—anyhow, anywhere, and the cries of neglected children, who were fractious because they were not allowed to go downstairs and see what the noise was all about. In the midst was Mrs. Peyton, looking perfectly distraught at the confusion around her, and utterly unable to say what she wished to be done.

She hailed her sister's advent with evident relief, though with a good many reproaches.

"How late you are, Isobel! I have been working like a horse the whole afternoon; and

are those all the flowers you've got? they'll never fill the *épergnes*, I'm sure; and who is to arrange them? Dinner is just going up into the little breakfast-room."

"I couldn't come sooner. Mademoiselle Colzatti was out, and we had to wait till she came in. It is only half-past six. Are the waiters come?" she added, addressing a servant.

"Yes, Miss; and the supper's every bit ready, downstairs."

"Then, where's the hurry? Come, Fanny, you go upstairs and make yourself easy. I'll do all this, directly. Mary! fill the *épergnes* and the drawing-room vases with water, and let the men move all these tables and chairs into the children's play-room."

She walked into the dining-room as she spoke, and threw off her bonnet and gloves. The hired waiters came in and lit the gas-chandelier for her, and stood by and admired the quickness and the taste with which she grouped her flowers and arranged their background of dark leaves and ferns. She did not complain once of the trouble, as she stood by the sideboard—her

mantle still on her shoulders—cutting stalks, sorting the different colours, and walking away every minute or two, to judge of the effect she was producing. Only once she gave a little sigh, but as quickly checked it.

“Are you tired, Miss?” asked Mary, respectfully, as she stood near her, holding the scissors.

“A little, Mary. I shall be glad when bedtime comes. Is everything prepared for this evening?”

“Everything, Miss. If missus wouldn’t worry herself, as I tell her, we could do everything quite well by ourselves. The tea and coffee and that is ready to be laid here, as soon as you’ve done your flowers; and the supper, Mr. Watkins have put it out on the two kitchen tables, and I am sure it look beautiful!”

“Well, light up the gas, then, and you’ll be ready. I suppose dinner has gone up?”

“Oh, yes, Miss! some time ago.” Which assertion was confirmed by the entrance of another servant, who had been sent down by Mrs. Peyton with a message to know if Miss

Fane was *never* coming to dinner?—and so she went up.

When she sat down to it she could not eat. Isobel often wondered why, whenever they gave a party, they were obliged to put up with mutton chops, or something equally nasty, for dinner? often to go almost without dinner at all. She did not wonder to see that her brother-in-law was absent. He knew better than to come home on the evening of one of his wife's entertainments, and was, doubtless, making himself very comfortable at the St. James', or elsewhere. Fanny did not seem to notice her sister's want of appetite. She ate plentifully herself, as she did at most times. As the cloth was being removed, she said—

“I hope you will dress early, Isobel, because some one must be dressed by nine o'clock in case any of them come; and you know how much I have to do.”

“I know you are never ready,” said Isobel, laughing, as she rose from the table. “Yes, Fanny. I will be sure to be in time.”

As she entered her bedroom, her own maid,

Ellen, met her with a look of great importance. In her hand she held a white-papered parcel, unmistakeable as to its contents, with its tapering stem and large round top.

“This came whilst you were at dinner, Miss, and I brought it straight up here.” And here Ellen paused for her mistress to inform her whether it was an order or a present. Isobel’s heart stood still; she took the bouquet from her servant’s hand and tore off the paper. Yes, it was the same that she had watched the making of—moss-roses, stephanotis, and a dozen others, fresh from the hothouse. She was trembling with pleasure, and yet she said, quite quietly—

“No message, Ellen?”

“No, Miss: ’twas a man-servant brought it, Mary says—looked like Mr. Reverdon’s.”

“Well, I don’t want you yet, Ellen; you can go until I ring for you.”

Ellen was almost as reluctant to go as her mistress was anxious to get rid of her; but she had no excuse. So after smoothing the folds of the white silk dress which lay on the bed, she slowly left the room.

What deceivers, by nature, women are, where their feelings are concerned ! Isobel's breast was in a tumult of pleasure, her head was going round with wonder, and yet she showed none of it !

“For *me*—did he get it for *me* ?” she thought, as she found herself alone ; and her features underwent all the varying expressions that they would have done had she been speaking — “*Why* ?”

For Rex Reverdon, though he had often visited at the house, and always been on friendly terms with all the family, had never been guilty of such a piece of gallantry towards her before. The words he had used to the girl in the flower shop, that he did not care how much it cost—his indifference to her fascinations—all rushed back upon Isobel's mind with the clearness of a picture. As she thought of it, and gazed at her flowers, she saw that the hand in which she held them shook.

“Oh, dear !” she exclaimed, as if a sudden fear struck her, “I *hope* I'm not going to fall in love with him. Going,” she repeated to

herself, indignantly, "I *won't*. I'm not a girl of seventeen. I won't do it. However, it's very kind of him to think of it. I suppose he wished to be polite. He has been here several times."

And so she determined it was intended for a species of payment for past civilities, and put it away from her sight whilst she arranged her hair in the same style she had worn it in the morning. She never wore flowers on her head; it was one of "Isobel's extraordinary crotchets" (as her sister said); but, nevertheless, when she was dressed in her white silk dress, with its ample over-skirts of clear tulle, and a few handsome articles of jewellery about her neck and arms, no one could have called her under-dressed.

As she descended to the drawing-room she encountered her sister, actually ready. The two women looked a great contrast. Fanny, who always wore her fair hair in a species of half-dishevelled state, having an idea, I believe, (not unlike that of some of the beauties of the present day,) that it was very becoming and

interesting to be untidy, wore a mass of flowers interwoven with it, and looked very much as if she had been *coifféd* over night, and gone to bed in her wreath, and never taken it off since. Her blue silk dress was half slipping off her shoulders; her gloves did not fit her properly; her worked handkerchief was too heavy for her dress. In fact, take her when you would, she was always that horrible thing—a woman without taste. As her eyes fell on the magnificent bouquet which Isobel carried she began to whine as usual.

“Well, Isobel, I think you *might* have brought me a bouquet whilst you were about it. Of course, if you stayed to have a thing like that made up, it’s no wonder you were late. I should like to know how much it cost. Just fancy spending money on oneself like that.”

Isobel ought to have said that the flowers were a present, but somehow she didn’t like to do so. Fanny was so foolish, she might try to make something out of it; so she allowed the imputation to rest upon her of having spent some of her own money upon herself.

"I did not think of bringing you a bouquet, Fanny, or I certainly would have done so. I won't forget it next time."

And her sister said it was just like her, and everybody in the house was thought of before herself. And then the first double knock resounded through the hall, and sent them both hurrying down into the reception room, to be seated in state, and look as if they had expected their guests for the last hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. AND MRS. PEYTON AT HOME.

THE brandy which Rex Reverdon had swallowed at his mother's house began to have its due effect upon him when he came out again into the open air. It was not the first he had had that day, and we all know how a little false excitement acts upon the mind, and makes things appear, for the time being, in a better light. Long before he had reached town again, chance No. 2 had ceased to appear so very formidable a thing to encounter. "Hang it!" he said to himself, as he made his horse's heels answer to the excitement going on in his own breast, "after all she's only a woman, and I oughtn't to be afraid of *them* by this time." As the false influence gained the ascendancy, he put away the thought of Pearl Ashton from

him resolutely. "What *are* women, when you come to think of them, that we should ever let them bother us for a moment? One's as good as another, if a man will only look at the thing in its proper light."

And then it struck him that it wouldn't be such a bad idea to go round by Covent Garden Market and get a bouquet for Miss Fane. Rex had very little notion at this time of the means of winning a woman's love, except by presents. I am afraid the poor boy had had reason to think it the best way. The fair ones he had courted hitherto had generally been accessible through the contents of his purse. Even Pearl Ashton, though he would have indignantly refuted the assertion, wheedled him, unconsciously to himself, out of half the things he gave her. And so he thought the best bouquet he could procure for money would be a very good means of paving the way with Isobel Fane for some of his soft nothings that evening. And so it was, for women are always more touched by an offering of flowers from the other sex than they would be by any other gift. There is

a grace, and an elegance, and a tenderness about the blossoms themselves, which seem to breathe of more than the mere action of giving them would imply. I believe, where a woman loves a man, or suspects that he loves her, that flowers from him are better to her than silver and gold—each petal appears redolent of silent passion.

When Rex reached home he despatched the bouquet by his servant without any message.

“I’ll tell her I sent it, this evening,” he thought, “and see what she looks like.”

Man’s inherent failing with regard to woman—vanity, was uppermost in Rex’s heart just then, and his friend Halkett’s speech of that morning returned to his mind, and made him almost anxious for the time to arrive when he should contemplate his conquest. He did not feel much appetite for dinner either, but he was thirstier than ever. Each time he thought of his losses he felt thirsty; each time he thought of Pearl Ashton he felt thirsty; each time he thought of Miss Fane he felt thirsty; so that, between the three, when he entered

the house in Torrington Square about ten o'clock that evening, and ran against Mr. Halkett in the hall, that gentleman perceived at once that his friend had been doing what is familiarly termed “taking more than is good for him.” Rex was in high spirits—the very best of spirits, indeed, running over with mirth. He passed his arm through his friend's directly he caught sight of him.

“Holloa ! old fellow,” he exclaimed, “why didn't you come in and dine with me this evening? Have you heard of my success? My lady consents to settle the whole of her property upon me, without reserve, on condition that I promise to do nothing but enjoy myself for the natural term of my life ; which I mean to do by securing the hand of the youngest woman in Great Britain.”

“Hush, hush, Reverdon, don't be so mad,” said Henry Halkett, afraid that the servants should overhear his speeches, or that he might commit himself farther. “I'm glad to see you here ; but I say, old fellow, you must be careful how you behave upstairs. You've been looking at the outside of a bottle, Rex, since I saw you.”

He had seen at a glance that the young man had been drinking to drown his care, or raise his spirits. The bright restless eye, the flushed cheeks, the hot breath, all told him so. Rex turned round and looked him in the face with well-affected surprise.

“I? Halkett — drinking? my faith! no; nothing stronger than toast and water, I can assure you.”

Not that Mr. Halkett believed him.

“All the better for his suit perhaps though,” he soliloquized as they ascended the staircase together, “he’s just in the mood now to make love to anybody.”

“Mr. Halkett—Mr. Reverdon,” and then they were in the middle of the room, bowing to the chandelier.

The drawing-rooms were very well arranged. The music was going on in the front one, which was twice as large as the other, and contained most of the company. The back room was devoid of furniture, unless a couple of sofas and a large stand of flowers could be called so. The gentlemen stood for a short time in the

centre of the larger apartment, gazing about them. Rex was looking for the heiress, so was Mr. Halkett. The rooms were very full; there were plenty of pretty women about, but she was not amongst them. Presently a movement in the crowd, and a way was made for the singer—Madlle. Colzatti—to be conducted to the piano, and through the momentary vista Rex caught sight of a white dress and a large bouquet on one of the sofas in the back room, and instantly commenced to make his way towards it, followed by his friend. The voluminous dresses, and the number of them, prevented Isobel Fane from seeing their approach. She was engaged in talking to several gentlemen, and not even looking towards the direction in which they advanced. Presently there was a voice near her, "Good evening, Miss Fane," very low, very marked, very impressive; and as she put out her hand and looked up, she encountered a pair of blue eyes looking straight into hers. The colour flew to her face, and spread itself thence in a warm glow over her neck and bosom—till she appeared like one blush. It had not decreased,

even when she turned towards Mr. Halkett and repeated the process of shaking hands.

“Go in and win, old boy,” was that gentleman’s whispered injunction into Rex’s whiskers, as he turned on his heel and left him to pursue his suit alone. The conversation did not at first go on very flourishingly; Rex was silent, and kept his eyes fixed upon the bouquet which Isobel held. She was evidently agitated, had broken off the thread of her conversation with her other friends, which had been so animated a moment before, and sat almost silent also, with the exception of an occasional monosyllable in answer to some direct question. The gentlemen began to find it dull; they wished Rex would move on, but he stood his ground and seemed in no wise prepared to do so, so one by one they moved themselves. The little back room was nearly empty now. Madlle. Colzatti was singing her favourite bravura of the season, and her admirers were all crowding round the piano, doing their best to impede the free utterance of her notes, and to prevent themselves reaping the benefit of them at the same time. Presently Rex raised his eyes from the

bouquet and fixed them on Miss Fane. From his great height, as he stood before her, he could considerably look down upon her. She certainly had a pretty little head, and a splendid figure.

How well her head was set upon her shoulders ! and what a beautiful bust she had ! The liquor Rex had imbibed had just sufficiently inflamed him to make him forget everything but the personal charms he gazed on. In his clearer moments, when wine had no influence over him, he scorned the idea of her being handsome. He did not love her, his heart was elsewhere, and her beauties were no more to him than the thousand and one beauties that every other woman who passed him in the streets possessed. But he could not reason to-night, he was not in a fit state to reason. He only saw before him an engaging woman ; his heated imagination heightened the interest she was supposed to feel for himself, and—he forgot everything else. If it had not been the case, he never would have gone so far as he did.

But Isobel saw nothing of this. She did not imagine for a moment that he had been drinking

too much. How should she? He did not show it except by the earnestness of his manner, the new light in his eyes.

As he found they were alone, he abandoned his standing position and threw himself on the couch by her side.

“That’s rather a pretty bouquet of yours, Miss Fane,” he observed presently.

Isobel never dreamt but that he must know she had guessed the giver.

“It is beautiful,” she said, with emphasis. “It was so exceedingly kind of you, Mr. Reverdon, to think of sending it me.”

“How do you know *I* sent it?” he exclaimed, with surprise. “Was it by instinct?” he added, lowering his voice.

Isobel blushed, but she was too truthful even to play at deception.

“The instinct of sight,” she answered. “I was in the shop, Mr. Reverdon, when you bought it, and admired it very much as it was being made up.”

It was his turn to start now.

“Were you really?” he said. “I remember

I observed there were some ladies present, but I never thought it was you. Why were you so unkind as not to speak to me?"

She laughed at his tragical tone.

"I thought you were very well employed, and could survive my want of attention," she said, carelessly.

"Did you? If I can survive yours, no one's will kill me, Miss Fane."

His words seemed so serious that her heart began to beat violently; but she turned off the remark with one relative to the singing of Mdlle. Colzatti, whose bravura had been vociferously encored.

"Yes; she sings very well," said Rex, in answer, "but she hasn't enough voice for the stage. Charming in a drawing-room though. Do you sing, Miss Fane?"

"Yes; but not sufficiently to show off before a professional. I had lessons from Colzatti herself for some time, but I have employments I like better, and so I gave them up."

"Do you ride?"

"Yes, and I am so fond of it."

Quite a light shone into Isobel's eyes as she spoke of her favourite exercise.

"Why haven't I seen you in the Park?"

"I do go sometimes; but Frederick is not much of a horseman, and he prefers a quiet road. I have often longed to ride in the Row, but have never been able to persuade him to go there yet."

"I wish I might," began Rex; and then as Isobel looked up at him he continued, "might I, Miss Fane? Would you think me *very* presumptuous if I offered myself occasionally, as a cavalier? I should be charmed to ride with you anywhere."

"Oh!" said Isobel, and she looked the pleasure she felt, "I should like it so much, Mr. Reverdon. I never have had as much riding as I have wished for. If my brother-in-law had cared for it more, I should have kept a horse of my own; but surely," she was going to add, "you must have plenty of other ladies to ride with;" but her delicacy told her this would be a bad compliment to repay his attention with, and so she stopped.

"Surely what, Miss Fane?"

She did not wish to tell him at first, but he was pertinacious, and the little controversy confused her, so that when at last she was compelled to confess what she had been going to say, it sounded as if she meant more by it than she did.

"I have none that I should like to ride with so much," he said, in answer. "When shall it be, Miss Fane? To-morrow?"

He had set out in pursuit, and was getting hot over it already. But Miss Fane was engaged to-morrow—particularly engaged—couldn't possibly put it off. Was going with some friends down to Richmond.

"To Richmond! How charming!" exclaimed Mr. Reverdon. "I wish we could make up a party amongst ourselves to Richmond—just a quiet few. Boat down there, and dine at Eel Pie Island. Home by moonlight. Wouldn't it be nice, Miss Fane?"

"Delightful!" she said, laughing, "but it is almost too early yet to think of the water by moonlight, Mr. Reverdon. You must wait for

a July night for that. The Maddisons are going in a drag to-morrow, and to dine at the Castle."

"The Maddisons? I know them. I wonder if Mrs. Maddison would admit me of the party."

"You must ask *her* that," said Isobel, laughing. "We start at twelve."

"No time," he said, with an expression of annoyance; "but I shall run over to Richmond, if I can, in the afternoon, and pop upon you *quite by mistake* you know. You won't betray me, Miss Fane, will you?"

She promised him not, at the same time wondering why he should be so anxious to make one of the pleasure party of which he had only heard a minute before.

"Will you ride the day after to-morrow, Miss Fane?" he said presently, taking up the broken thread of their former discourse, as the little back drawing-room began to refill with those who could not find seats in the front.

"With pleasure," she answered. "At what time, Mr. Reverdon?"

"Three o'clock is as good a time as any, I

think, and then we shall have the full benefit of the Row."

"I will be sure to be ready," she answered, quietly. There were several people about her now—people who had been looking at her several times from the front drawing-room, and remarking to one another, in their good-natured way, how "abominably Miss Fane was flirting with that young Reverdon."

She tried to enter into conversation with some of them and render the talking more general, but Rex refused to open his mouth to any one but her, and when she was engaged with others, sat silent by her side. Her bouquet was lying on her lap; he took it up, and commenced smelling the flowers and pulling them about. Presently she perceived his action, and turned round upon him.

"I cannot allow that, Mr. Reverdon. You mustn't destroy my flowers. How do you know I don't value them?"

"Do you value them?" he said, turning quickly to her.

"A little," she answered, coquettishly.

“Too much to give me one?”

Isobel considered. She did not wish to give him a flower. At the same time it would not do to appear to set too great store upon his own gift, so she said—

“Which one do you want?”

“The centre one.”

The centre one was a splendid moss-rose.

“What, the rose, and destroy all my bouquet! Really, Mr. Reverdon, you are not at all diffident. You will ask for the bouquet itself next.”

“I want the rose because of its meaning,” he said, in a whisper. “Will you give it me, Miss Fane?”

His words implied, “Will you give me the rose?” but his eye said, “it is the meaning that I want,” and we all know that the significance of the rose is love. Truly, Mr. Rex Reverdon, whatever he lacked in other accomplishments, was evidently no novice in the art of courtship. Isobel Fane could not pretend to mistake the expression of his eyes, and she turned quite faint under them. She rose hastily from the sofa where she sat, and asked a young lady who stood

near it to sit down in her place. The young lady remonstrated, as ladies will, but Miss Fane said the room was very warm, and she was going into the next to speak to her sister. Of course she could not be permitted to make the perilous transit alone; but Rex Reverdon was not amongst the gentlemen who offered their assistance in conducting Miss Fane across. He judged rightly that he had produced sufficient effect for one interview, and that to follow her might appear presumptuous. But Miss Fane's words with her sister were very few. They were simply, "How are you getting on, Fanny? it's nearly supper time," and then she managed to gain the other door somehow, and to creep to her own room. How cool the passages felt after the gas-heated drawing-rooms! Isobel put her hand against her cheek, and it was burning. The gas in her bedroom was turned down very low; but she did not seem to heed that. She threw herself down on the little couch in the darkness, and tried to think.

"What does he mean?" she soliloquized.
"What *can* he mean? Is it possible he can

like me? and yet this bouquet and his wish to meet me again to-morrow and next day." She held the flowers to her lips as the thought struck her, and kissed them passionately. And then she lay quiet for a few minutes, and thought, "Why *should* he like me?" She went on presently to say, "I am so *much* older than he is. I wonder if he knows my age. Where's the gas?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, and turning up the burner until the flame flared upwards, to the certain destruction of its chimney, and then she turned to the cheval glass, and looked at herself as she had done in the morning. She was better pleased than she had been then. The pure white dress, disclosing her beautiful neck and arms, became her well, and a smile stole over her features, which silently acknowledged it.

"I'm a conceited creature," she said to herself, as she turned away; "I'm always looking in the glass now. I wonder if he thinks me nice-looking. I know I'm not pretty, and he must see such lots of pretty women, and I dare say they run after him enough too, horrid

creatures!” and here she stamped her foot in her indignation; “yet *if, if* he should like me. Oh, Reginald!”

And then down came the woman’s restorative—tears. They did her good. The excitement, the trembling in her heart, the burning heat in her face, went with them, and she felt able to go downstairs again. Indeed, when she had bathed her eyes, and poured half a bottle of eau-de-Cologne over her neck and shoulders, she was eager to go. She wondered she could have wasted a whole half hour already. She almost ran down the staircase. She wanted to see him again. But she went with the fixed determination to tell him how old she was. But on the staircase she encountered her brother-in-law. You have not been introduced to Mr. Peyton yet; but I thought the introduction would keep. He is not much worth knowing. Small of stature, with a face which, without being positively bad-looking, had all the charm of its features marred by the expression of instability which pervaded them, Frederick Peyton’s ruling passion in life was selfishness. It was selfishness

which had first prompted him to marry his wife without the means of supporting her; it was selfishness which permitted him almost to live upon the allowance his relatives made to him, and the generosity of his sister-in-law. His eagle eyes had been watching the flirtation of Rex Reverdon with Isobel all the evening; he had watched her exit also, and had purposely left the room after her, in order to speak to her as she came down again. He had consequently dangled his heels on the landing-place for a longer term than he had at first anticipated, which had not improved his temper, at all times peppery.

“Why, Fred, what are you doing here?” was Isobel’s remark, as she encountered him.

“I came out here to speak to you, Isobel,” he said, looking very much like an angry cock-sparrow. “I do wish you’d divide your attentions a little more equally, and not leave Fanny to do all the honours of the evening.”

“What do you mean?”

The words jerked out curtly, almost rudely, from Miss Fane’s lips. There was nothing she

resented so much as anything like interference from her brother-in-law, whom she cordially disliked.

“Mean?” he repeated, rather discomfited; “why, you’ve been in the little back-room flirting all the evening with Mr. Reverdon, and everybody has remarked it; it looks very particular—very bad, especially with a young fellow like Reverdon, and——”

“Will you allow me to manage my own affairs, Fred?” was her answer. “I shall talk to whom I like, and your friends may say what they choose. Absurd nonsense! Let me pass, if you please.”

And she swept by him into the drawing-room with the air of a queen, leaving him, looking anything but like a conqueror, to follow as he chose. But she would not go into the back-room again after that. She was not going to let people say she flirted, or wished to flirt; so she remained by her sister, and urged young ladies to sing, and stood by them whilst they performed in an agony of fear, lest she should not keep her countenance throughout the proceeding. She

did not even look towards the back drawing-room. She had no idea whereabouts Mr. Reverdon was; but when midnight struck, and supper was announced, he was there at her side, somehow, ready to take her down. And so she placed her arm through his, and passed her brother-in-law with a look too indignant to be saucy, as she disappeared with her cavalier into the supper-room. There, if possible, he became more particular than before. He was all humiliation at first and meekness for fear he had offended her in asking for the flower. Had he now? Only tell him. No, Miss Fane assured him she was not angry, only surprised. Then if she was really not angry, would she prove her forgiveness by giving it him now as a pledge. All this in whispers between the intervals of changing plates and filling glasses; and he looking abominably handsome the while, so that it came to pass that the rose really did find its way at last from the bouquet-centre to his button-hole, whence he deposed a yellow one for its reception.

“You’ve ruined my pretty bouquet,” said

Miss Fane, ruefully, as she contemplated the devastation the removal of the rose had caused in its arrangement.

"I suppose you couldn't insert the yellow one instead?" said Rex, meditatively.

"Oh, dear, no! impossible; the evil is irremediable, Mr. Reverdon."

"And all my fault," he pretended to sigh; "but the temptation, Miss Fane, was too strong. This was a pretty rose," he added, as he held the dethroned yellow beauty in his hand. He did not quite like to offer it to her; but he wanted her to ask for it. But she would not take the hint. "It is good for nothing now," he said, making another trial. "I must throw it away."

"Oh, no! don't do that," cried Isobel, with all a woman's horror at a beautiful flower being wasted or destroyed. "That would be a shame, Mr. Reverdon."

"I shall, unless—unless *you* would take it," he whispered, leaning over her chair.

She coloured up, and was silent.

"Will you?" he asked, in the same tone.

"It's a pity to waste it," she observed.

He held it towards her, and she took it without further remark, and placed it in her bosom.

“Happy rose,” he said, as she did so.

She was getting nervous again. She wished the ladies would make a move. Somebody asked her to join them in the insane custom of pulling crackers. She pulled several, and laughed at the absurdity of the mottoes, and then she was aware that Mr. Reverdon was standing by her again, silently presenting one end of a cracker for her edification.

“What, another?” she said, laughing.

“I know you young ladies can never pull one too many,” he rejoined.

“But I’m not a young lady,” she answered, hastily. “Mr. Reverdon, do you know how old I am?”

He knew well enough—that is to say, he thought she was older than she really was; but his politeness would not permit him to say so. He merely answered—

“Am I to guess?”

“Yes, if you like,” she said.

“One and twenty.”

“Nonsense, Mr. Reverdon!” and Isobel really looked annoyed. “You must think me very foolish if you imagine I should believe that. I am thirty—at least, I shall be next birthday.”

It was out at last; but she felt very hot as she said it, and was almost afraid to mark what effect the announcement might have upon him.

“Are you?” he answered; “how jolly! I wish every woman was!”

“Why?”

“Because they would all be so much the more charming.”

It was all great nonsense and very absurd. Isobel would have said so of any other man; but with this one the only effect it had was in keeping her awake until the morning. All nonsense and very absurd, but the very essence of the colouring matter which tinged all her life nevertheless.

How much for poor Harold?

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE HOUSE AT ISLINGTON.

THE little house at Islington formed part of a row of little houses, all rejoicing in front gardens of exactly the same pattern, size about four feet square, with a hard, uncompromising stony walk, too small for mortal foot to tread on, surrounding a bed of weeds encircled by a miniature Stonehenge, the whole enclosed by green wooden palings. Each house possessed two windows and one door, with generally two or three plants before the muslin blind in the parlour window, or an embossed card, to the effect that a bed might be had for a single gentleman, or that Miss Thompson was a dress-maker and milliner. The house which Mr. Ashton and his daughter occupied was in no wise less common-looking than its neighbours.

It might have been so, for presents both of money and goods had been lavishly bestowed upon its inmates, for some years past, from the open hand of their friend, Rex Reverdon; but Miss Ashton had no taste, and preferred decking her person, and spreading her table, to making her surroundings more elegant. Comfortable they undoubtedly were, Rex would not have permitted them to remain otherwise; but there was no trace of a woman's hand about them, no flowers to make the common little vases on the mantel-piece lose their look of vulgarity, no muslin curtain to screen the sun, which glared in at the unshaded windows. Heavy moreen hangings of scarlet, bound with yellow braid, graced them alone, whilst the gaudy drugget, the horse-hair chairs, and the oil-cloth covered table within, were at utter variance with anything like refinement. And yet Rex had spent some of his happiest hours in this vulgar little hole. He had lolled on that hard unyielding sofa whilst he smoked his cigar, and drank out of those twopenny tumblers; and felt unable to tear himself away, whilst the steel-grey eyes of

Elizabeth Ashton were making violent love to him, and her soft flaxen hair was floating over his coat sleeve, and touching his cheek every moment. For that she *had* made violent love to him, there is no doubt. For some time after the commencement of their friendship she had called Rex her brother, and he had been pleased to hear her call him so, but as their intimacy grew closer and closer, she had dropped that title, at the same time that she had evinced no inclination for a diminution of their affection. From the first moment that she had met this careless, good-natured, well-to-do young fellow on board the 'Glendower' steam-packet, she had had her designs on him, and her design was to seduce him into a marriage with herself. It was not the first time Miss Ashton had been similarly employed during her lifetime. Bred and brought up amongst the military, she had followed her father in his capacity of band-master from one garrison town to another, and none did she leave, without having made at least an attempt, praiseworthy as to its perseverance, to change her name before she

did so. Once or twice she had succeeded in being engaged, for men are easily taken in by a woman who knows how to make the use of her charms that Elizabeth Ashton did; but commanding officers and infuriated mothers had stepped in to the rescue and carried off the intended victim, just as the eagle will swoop down upon some weaker bird of prey; and snatch the tempting morsel he fancies he has just secured for himself from his beak. But the fact of having been twice foiled, if it disheartened her for the time being, had not turned Elizabeth Ashton from her fixed purpose of marrying a gentleman. She knew she had beauty, and plenty of cunning (though she called it wit), and women have gained the same object before now, with the first weapon only; and therefore she was quite determined that, sooner or later, she would have Rex Reverdon. But he was a long time coming to the point. Miss Ashton was a woman of no principle. If she could have gained her object by yielding her honour to him, and then throwing herself upon his generosity, she would not have hesitated

to do so. She had even gone so far as to give him a hint of her readiness to become his altogether—at any cost, in any way. But Rex had not taken the hint. Strange to say, accustomed as he was, from his wealth, his careless habits, and his unquiet resorts, to attacks of all sorts from the unthinking portion of the other sex, yet Elizabeth Ashton's soft whispers never struck him in the light she intended them to do. The fact is he did not look for it from her, he thought too well of her. He never dreamt she had any design in loving him beyond gratitude, and—well, he supposed he was not utterly unloveable. He knew he loved her, as a friend and sister, dearly. Latterly, however, he had begun to think about her more. The notion of the propriety of his looking for money with a wife had been mooted to him from various quarters some little while ago, as I have before mentioned to you. At such moments he had begun to wonder, why every time he thought of marriage the remembrance of Pearl Ashton came into his head, and he could see nothing but those clear eyes (clear to him, cold to others) and that

fair flaxen hair. This phenomenon had caused him to question his own heart seriously, and he had been obliged to confess to himself, as he did subsequently to his friend, that he was afraid he *was* getting “a little spooney” in that quarter. And with this suspicion aroused, Elizabeth Ashton’s love whispers commenced to take effect. “By Jove! he believed little Pearl was getting spooney too.” I must do Rex the justice to say that this fancied discovery gave his honest heart a great deal of pain. He could not marry her, he loved her too well to ruin her. The only thing he could do, was to leave off visiting her. But how the poor girl would feel his defection! and could she take his presents, and accept his offers of assistance, without his friendship? It was this thought that had kept him hitherto from making, what he called, a “break” between them. But if he was really to woo and marry another woman, it must be done. On the morning after the party at Mrs. Peyton’s, he got up in the very lowest of spirits. All the gay insouciance of the night before, which had been falsely raised, and made to

appear what it was not, by the use of intoxicating spirits, had vanished with his sleep. The events of the past evening were very indistinctly remembered by him, he only felt that he had committed himself with respect to Miss Fane, and that he had regularly “gone in for it,” and there was no retreating—for the confused state of his mind exaggerated the extent to which he had flirted with her. But if he could not recollect all that had passed by candlelight, he remembered only too distinctly what had occurred before it. The debts—unpayable, the love—not to be indulged. His spirits from the reaction were, if possible, lower than they had been the day before. He could have cried as he thought of it. But he reasoned with himself, like a man, instead.

“If the thing *must* be done it must. It is only like severing a limb; and the sooner it is over the better! I will go and see Pearl to-day for the last time. Halkett may say what he likes, but he cannot know how much I love the girl, or he would see the risk I should run in keeping up my intimacy with her. Then, if

I do marry Miss Fane, I'll go on the Continent for a few years, and Pearl will be married herself, or have forgotten me before I come back.”

And so he set himself resolutely to what he rightly considered the performance of a duty; and as soon as he conveniently could, set off on his way to Islington. He felt he could not rest until he had seen her.

In the meanwhile, the new June sun had uprisen with brilliancy, and shining upon the windows of Percival Row, Islington, set all their panes glittering as though they had been plate-glass, and made Miss Ashton impatient that her father should take his way to the theatre, and not run the risk of another stoppage of pay on account of being late at rehearsal. I am afraid she had a difficult task in general to make the old man do anything in time; for Mr. Ashton had not given up his favourite failing with the passing years. Few drunkards ever do. He had already lost an excellent situation at one of the west end houses, from the fact of the second violin having been found—for the third time—drunk and incapable somewhere behind the

scenes at the very moment when the orchestral bell had rung. Now he was employed at a theatre nearer home; not so refined, and not so lucrative, but still bringing in something—without which they must have depended solely upon Rex Reverdon for their support. But it was half-past nine, and the rehearsal was called at ten, and still old Ashton was slumbering heavily, and his daughter was waiting for his appearance impatiently in the little sitting-room below.

“What on earth’s come to father?” she exclaimed, for the twentieth time, to an untidy-looking girl who came in daily to do the rougher part of the housework for her.

“Lor! I don’t know, I’m sure,” answered the handmaid. “I’ve shook him up twice, but he lies like a log.”

“Go up again—do—and say, I’m not going to keep the breakfast hanging about here all day. If he does not choose to come, I shall have the table cleared.”

The girl disappeared up the narrow staircase to give the desired message, and Miss Ashton

turned to the oblong glass in a black frame, which stood over the wooden mantelpiece, and “settled” herself. She certainly was beautifully fair, but her figure had grown very thin, and the years during which we have lost sight of her had had no power to obliterate that look of cruelty which pervaded her mouth and eyes. She was becomingly dressed in a blue and white muslin, which was a rare thing for her to be so early in the morning. But the fact is, she had not seen Rex for several days, and she fully expected he would not let this one pass without calling ; and she never let him catch her untidy if she could help it. She looked very well satisfied with herself, as she smoothed down her collar, and pulled out the drooping bands of her hair, and pinched the folds of her starched dress to make them lie neatly. She had determined to open an assault upon her lover the next time she saw him, and she thought she read “victory” written upon every charm she possessed. But she had a stouter heart to deal with than she reckoned upon. She fancied Rex was a fool ; but a man who is foolish by nature and a man

who is foolish from want of thought are two different things.

The third application of a good grip from the young servant's hard hand upon Mr. Ashton's unprotected shoulder, and a good shout in his ear as she delivered his daughter's message, had the desired effect of thoroughly rousing him at last; and as he never wasted any time in either his ablutional or devotional exercises, it was not long before he appeared in the little parlour, with half-closed, bloodshot eyes, an unshorn chin, and rough hair, to receive the full vial of Miss Ashton's wrath upon his devoted head.

"You're a nice object to sit down to breakfast with," she commenced, "after having kept me waiting for an hour, at least. You look more like a tinker than a Christian. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Mr. Ashton feebly commenced to remonstrate—

"My dear Lizzie!"

"Hold your tongue—do!" retorted his daughter. "Don't talk to me! I suppose you've been drinking again—like a beast! I'll take

good care you don't get a sixpence of your next week's salary. I'll speak to the manager about you—see if I don't!”

There is a point, I suppose, beyond which even the most degraded must turn, and try to sting. Mr. Ashton bore a great deal from this spirited daughter of his; but her last words were too much for him.

“How dare you speak so to your father, Lizzie?” he said; “I won't stand it.”

“My father?” she repeated, sarcastically; “are you my father? For my own part, I can hardly believe sometimes that you are. Fathers don't sit down quietly and drink all they earn away, whilst their daughters may support themselves any way, or be supported by God knows who!”

He made an effort to interrupt her; but she went on—

“Fathers—true fathers, that is to say—don't stand by quietly, and see their daughters live on young men's money, without making a single inquiry on the subject. How do you know what I am? What do you care?”

“Whatever you are, Lizzie, I know that you’ve got kind friends, which is more than I have,” whined the old man.

“How can you say that? You use his money whenever you can get hold of it. You sink lower and lower every day by it under the influence of your disgusting vice. How do you know what I might not have been before now, if I had not had you tacked to my side, to pull me downwards? Who would link themselves with such as you? What chance have I of rising whilst you live?”

“I thought you used to say that your friend Mr. Reverdon would marry you, spite of everything—even of *me*?” sneered her father.

“So I used, and so I do; at least, if he doesn’t marry me at once, he shall give me a promise that shall do as well. I have made up my mind during the last few days, I stay here no longer. Any situation is preferable to this one.”

“And you would leave your poor father alone, Lizzie?” said Mr. Ashton, trying to do the sentimental.

"And what if I do," she rejoined quickly ; "my remaining here does you no good ; it only injures me. I could have married Rex Reverdon ages ago, if there had not always been the thought of being tacked to you for ever, to turn his mind the other way. I have depended on you for many years, and you have never done anything but act as a foil to all my plans. Now, I shall act for myself."

"And what are your plans, Lizzie?"

"That's my business," she answered. "Anyway, they will take me away from you. I've played at the farce of affection between us for too long. I'm weary of it. Ain't you going to have any breakfast?"

"Ain't you going to have any yourself?" asked her father, for he didn't like the threat she held out of leaving him, and he wished to conciliate her.

"I breakfasted an hour ago," she answered, without any thanks ; "and if you don't look sharp about yours, you'll be late for rehearsal again."

She did not sit down, but stood by the little mantelpiece, with a contemptuous kind of smile

upon her thin lips, as the old man hastily ate his scanty meal before her, looking very much like a beaten dog the while, or a dog that expects a beating. When he rose, and took up his violin-case, preparatory to setting off to his morning's work, he asked her if she should be at home when he returned. He always dined at an eating-house, for his daughter would not take the trouble to cook his dinner, and therefore they generally parted in the morning until tea-time. His question now referred to that hour.

"Perhaps, yes—perhaps, no," was her indifferent answer. "I shouldn't think it would make much difference to you which it was. If I am at home, however, and you want your tea you'd better come in time, or you won't get it."

She exchanged no farewell with him but this, but still leant against the mantelpiece watching his departure, with no kindlier ray lighting up her features as he shuffled out of the open door.

But when he was fairly gone a look of relief came over her face, and she changed her position, and busied herself in clearing away the remains of the breakfast, and setting the little

room in order against the arrival of her expected visitor. And he came at last, although not until she had waited for him a couple of hours. That something was wrong she guessed directly she saw him. He entered with a listless, down-cast air, which he seldom brought with him into the little house at Islington.

"Well, Pearl!" he said, as she came forward to greet him.

He took the girl's upturned face in his hands, and looked at it for a moment, and then released it with a sigh. He had been used to kiss her when they met, and she was disappointed at the omission.

"Why, what's the matter, Rex?" she exclaimed.

"Matter, Pearl? Matter enough," he answered, as he sat down on the little sofa, and rested his head upon his hand. She sat down by his side, and crept nearer to him by degrees, until she had laid her head upon his shoulder. But he was thinking so deeply that he did not seem to feel the light pressure until she took his hand and tried to draw his arm around her

figure. Then he roused himself, and sat up straight upon the sofa, and put her away from him very gently, but with decision.

“Don’t do that, Pearl,” he said.

The action and the words did not appear to please her, for she bit her lip, and gave her head rather a disdainful toss. But she knew how to play her cards too well to attempt it again.

Presently he said suddenly, and of his own accord—

“I lost almost all my money, Pearl, the other day on the Derby. I’ve ruined myself.”

The news seemed to affect her wonderfully, for she could hardly answer him. When, seeing her face of blank wonder and incredulity, he repeated his assertion, and told her how his misfortune had come to pass, she showed every sign of the intensest sympathy. Her emotion arose solely for the loss of the money; but he attributed it to affection for himself.

“My dear girl,” he said, “I was sure you would feel for me, whatever others did. Yes! it’s a true bill, Pearl; I’m a poor man.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

"That's what everybody has asked me, Pearl, but I scarcely know myself yet. Some of my friends have given me a very good piece of advice. What do you think it is?"

"What?" she echoed.

"To take a rich wife; and they've done more than advise, Pearl—they've found her for me."

"And you?" demanded the girl.

Rex felt reckless, and with a man's recklessness there generally comes a bitterness of feeling which will permit them to wound whilst they know they are wounding—even those they love best. His answer to Miss Ashton's question was given carelessly, even gaily.

"Oh, I'm quite agreeable, Pearl. I began my courting yesterday, and have got half-way through it already. You'll see me a married man in another month. That is what I came to tell you of to-day."

Rage, disappointment, wounded vanity, were eating into the woman's heart like fire, and yet she sat by his side, and betrayed not one of them. She had never loved the man. She felt at this moment as if she almost hated him.

But Rex's assumed indifference could not last.

He turned round to look at the girl, and see how she took his news. That one look told her that he was in her power, and she commenced to act immediately. She rose from the sofa, walked from the room without a word, and commenced an ascent upstairs. Then he was frightened; he thought he had wounded her beyond her control; he followed her to the bottom of the staircase, and kept calling her by name, and entreating her to come down again. In the meanwhile, she was deliberating on her best course of action. She was trembling with rage to think that if what he said was true, her prize was likely to slip through her fingers, but she determined that he must see nothing in her behaviour but the effects of an overwhelming shock on the reception of the news. When he had called and called her till he was almost tired she re-appeared, walking very slowly, and apparently very faint. As she re-entered the sitting-room, he (who had not been slow to lay the flattery to his soul, that all this emotion

was on his account) was all eagerness to know what was the matter with her.

"Are you ill, dear Pearl?" he inquired, as he placed her on the sofa, and knelt by her side.

"No, Rex, not ill, only a little faint. You can tell me all now, I am strong enough to bear it."

It must be told her, sooner or later. Rex remembered he had come with that purpose, and plucked up all his courage.

"It is not much to tell, Pearl," he commenced. "I have squandered all my fortune, and am going to try and patch up matters, as many another has done before me, by a mercenary marriage. The worst part of the business is, that it will cause a separation between you and me. And yet, I can scarcely say so, for we should have had to separate, in any case; I felt that months ago."

Miss Ashton was really alarmed now; to give up the thought of marriage with a ruined man was not so hard to bear, but to resign the friendship of a married man with lots of money was a much greater calamity.

“Why?” she asked, with wide staring eyes. Halkett had asked the same question of him, but it was harder to frame an answer to Pearl Ashton than to him. He looked at her eyes, her mouth, her hair. He thought he read love for himself impressed upon every lineament of her face, and his own feelings burst all bounds.

“Why?” he exclaimed passionately, as he covered her face with kisses, “why? because I *love* you, Pearl; because I have loved you for months, and I dare not trust myself in your presence any longer. I dare not trust myself to feel the pressure of your hands, the touch of your lips; they madden, whilst they intoxicate me. I cannot be your friend, Pearl, or your brother; I must have more from you, or less.”

She had closed her eyes whilst he was speaking, and lay back on the sofa, listening to his impassioned words, whilst feelings of triumph rushed through her heart. But she did not answer, nor strive to check him.

“I have felt it for months, Pearl, but never so much as now. There can be no middle course

henceforward. You must be everything to me, or nothing.”

“ Why cannot I be *everything* ? ”

The whisper came hissing from her lips, like a message from the old serpent himself, as it was ; and her hearer understood her, though he professed not to do so.

“ Pearl, I tell you I am ruined. I can never marry, unless I marry a woman with money.”

“ Then you will quite desert me ? ” she said, presently, and her breast commenced to heave as she spoke. It was a difficult position to be placed in : until this day he had had no conception of how much he loved her, and now it fell to his lot to pronounce the fiat of separation between them : for a separation he felt more convinced every moment there must be.

“ Pearl,” he exclaimed, “ can’t you understand my feelings regarding you ? Do you think it can be a pleasure to exile myself from you at the very time I have found out that you are necessary to my happiness ? But there is danger for both of us in these meetings, danger now that I am free, and guilt when I am not.”

“And this woman that you hope to marry, you love her?”

The question was asked with a woman's usual cunning, only to extract fresh asseverations of devotion towards herself from her lover.

“Love her?” he echoed; “Pearl, I loathe the thoughts of her. When I think of you, of all the years we have known each other, of your fair—fair beauty, I could risk all, everything, only to feel myself free to love you. But I must have money, Pearl; I have involved myself on every side, and I have no other means of extrication, no other chance, but this. Love her! My queen, do you think I could love her, with you before me, my fair-haired Pearl.”

“Is she pretty?” next asked his deity, with an affected sigh.

“Pretty? no,” he answered, “or if she is I cannot see it. She's three times my age, if that's any recommendation. Don't talk to me of her, Pearl. Talk of yourself; perhaps this is the last time we shall ever be together alone.”

“What is there to say?” she exclaimed pas-

sionately. “I don’t care what becomes of me, or of father either.”

“Pearl, I have thought of that. Your father shall not suffer because I am such a coward that I cannot stand the fire of your love and my own. You know my friend Mr. Halkett; he will often see you, I hope, and——and you shall hear from me; and perhaps, Pearl, after some time has passed, when you and I are cured, we may meet again, and be the brother and sister that we have been, to our lives’ end.”

“Oh! why not now, why not now?” she cried, clinging to him as he rose.

“I have told you, Pearl; don’t ask me again, unless you wish to drive me mad. I go from this house to-day with a fixed purpose in my heart, to woo and win a woman for the convenience of her money—a woman whom I don’t care a hang about. Isn’t that sufficient injury for me to do at a time, without wronging you too, by continuing my visits here? and to what purpose, Pearl—to what purpose?”

She could have told him to what purpose. To keep him in her power, to extract from him still

those many benefits for which her pretended love was only pre-payment, to have her share in the fortune for which he withdrew his presence from her. But she only said—

“Oh ! Reginald, I have loved you so much : and this is the end of it !”

“God help you, Pearl !” was all his answer.

“You are not in earnest, Rex ; you will come to see your own Pearl sometimes ; you will not forget me entirely, because you have a wife and every comfort round you ?”

She twined her arms serpent-wise around him as she spoke ; she laid her velvet cheek against his, her soft lips touched his own, her whole slight form lay in his embrace !

The contact maddened him. With an oath, more against his destiny than her, he disengaged himself from her clinging clasp, and thrust her from him. Then he seized his hat and stick, and before she could recover from the astonishment which the suddenness of the act caused her he had stridden from the room, upsetting a chair in his hasty exit, and was through the little garden and half-way up the road. When she

found that she was really alone, and that Rex had evidently no intention of returning, for that day at least, her chagrin knew no bounds—“He thinks he shall escape me, does he?” she inwardly exclaimed, as she paced up and down the small apartment like a caged beast impatient of its boundaries; “but time will show. He’s very brave to-day is Mr. Rex, but he let out a little too much for his own purpose, and quite enough for mine. When he might have married me he wouldn’t—I was not a good enough wife, doubtless, for the rich fashionable Mr. Reverdon; and now that he has ruined himself, like a fool, and spent all his money in dissipation, he is going to marry and be a ‘good boy:’ ‘do the quiet,’ I suppose; go to bed every night at nine o’clock, and avoid anything so dangerous to his morality as my friendship. But we shall see! Not having found any one to replace you, I can’t afford to give you up so easily just yet. You may call yourself ‘free,’ Mr. Reverdon, but as long as it serves my purpose to be friends with you, you don’t shake me off so easily I can tell you!”

In the meanwhile her lover's feelings were not of the most enviable description. He had torn himself away from the little house at Islington, but he had left his heart there. Each hour of that weary day as it went past, told him so again and again. He had voluntarily resigned her love, even her friendship, and he was miserable. And yet he did not swerve once from his purpose. He must resign her, or marry her—and he couldn't marry her. There was one thing in the world dearer to Rex Reverdon than his love, and that was his honour. Is it not so with all men? they will dare a great deal for a woman; run the risk of danger, even of death: they will give up for her sake the promise of worldly fame, of wealth, even of happiness, except such as lies in her possession; but they will not accept love at the price of honour. All glory to them for it! It is that which makes their love, when they truly bestow it, the most valuable gift which a woman can receive, the only thing on this earth which gives her a foretaste of heaven. Thus it was why Rex Reverdon could, without flinching, throw

love and happiness (as he thought it) in one scale and honour in the other, and find that the duty weighed heavier than the delight. But, though he was firm, he felt it none the less. All that day he kept at home, very "dull," as he thought of his past and future, very disinclined to go a wooing to Miss Fane.

And, indeed, the consequence of it was, that he never went, as he had promised, either to Wimbledon or Richmond; and thus Miss Ashton was not the only person interested in his proceedings who was disappointed in him that day.

CHAPTER X.

REX CONTINUES TO MAKE WAY.

AND yet no one who had seen him, as he joined Isobel Fane to keep his appointment with her to ride in the Park would have suspected for a moment that he had spent the day before in the greatest depression of spirits in parting with the only woman he cared for. He was a mass of apologies for his non-appearance at the pic-nic; a mass of politeness and (apparently) excitement in the anticipation of the pleasure before them.

“A most stupid thing, Miss Fane, my having missed Richmond yesterday, a disappointment for which I shall not easily forgive myself, but all my own fault, nevertheless. I put it off until it was too late. A charming day for our ride, isn't it? I only hope you will enjoy it, as

much as I intend to do. The Row will be crowded. What a nice little mare that is of yours ! Does your brother intend to accompany us ?"

"My brother-in-law, you mean, Mr. Reverdon ; I have a brother of my own, and I never allow anybody else to usurp his title," (especially, she might have added, such as Fred Peyton). "Yes, Mr. Peyton is coming also, but his horse has not yet arrived ; there it comes, round the corner. Tell your master, Mary, that we are ready."

Rex was riding his own horse, a fine, thoroughbred animal, from which he now dismounted, and gave it into the charge of his groom, as he proceeded to put Miss Fane upon the little mare. The foot she placed in his hand was beautifully shaped, and the slightest impetus on his part sent her light figure flying into the saddle ; and yet he did the business most mechanically, and scarcely noticed either her foot or her agility, as he would have done that of another woman. He talked fast, and he laughed a good deal, but his heart was neither in his

laughter nor in his words. To others they may have served as a cover for his real depression, but he could not deceive himself. When Mr. Peyton made his appearance and mounted his steed, the party took their way, at a sober walking pace, to the Park. Of course the first topic of conversation between Miss Fane and Mr. Reverdon turned on the pic-nic of the day before. Rex asked her how she had enjoyed herself, and she answered truly, "Very little." But his next question, "Why not?" brought the blood to her face, as she tried to give him a reasonable reply. The fact is, "Why not?" was simply because the gentleman riding beside her had not been there; but she could not tell him so.

Isobel Fane had gone to bed the night of the party at her sister's house in a species of ecstatic dream. Old thoughts and feelings, which, as she had told herself, she imagined she had done with for ever, had come back to her with redoubled force. She had loved before,—or she had thought she had loved,—but she had never felt like this before. No man

had ever had the power yet to make her thrill all over at the sound of his voice—at the touch of his hand—as this boy Rex Reverdon could do. The dead man resting in his grave had no more awakened such feelings in her breast in the past than the remembrance of him could quell them in the present. If she had suspected before that her heart was not entirely safe, if she had dreaded its loss, she was sure now that it was gone. Come what might, whether Rex Reverdon spent his life with her or whether she never saw him again, she felt that henceforward his fate could never be a subject of indifference to herself; that that mysterious *something* had arisen within her heart which must be a link between her soul and his for ever. She had not reproached herself for the feeling, as she had done a few hours before; she had not despised or been angry with herself; she had only longed intensely for the next day to dawn, that she might meet him again, and find out whether he looked and spoke the same by daylight as he had that evening; whether it could be really, *really* true, that he

liked her the least possible bit in the same way that she liked him. She had risen the next morning in the same feverish state of excitement; had watched for him secretly whilst with her friends at Richmond, hours before it was probable he would join them; and had gone through all the stages of suspense, and sickness, and weariness, and loss of hope, which are the component parts of that bitter pill called Disappointment, which we mortals have so often to swallow whilst here below. Consequently, when she returned home late in the evening, and her sister had asked her whether she had enjoyed herself, she had vehemently exclaimed against the whole proceeding: "The stupidest day she had ever spent; not a thing to be seen in Richmond; the whole party hadn't an idea between them; and it was abominably cold driving home."

And she didn't go to bed that night in nearly as good a humour as she had done the night before. She was ready to blame herself now for having been so foolish as to imagine the man meant what he said, or ever intended to keep

the appointment, or cared two straws whether he saw her again or not. She dare-say-ed he was tipsy at the time, and didn't remember a word he had given utterance to (which last conclusion was as true as any Miss Fane had arrived at yet, though she did not really believe what she affirmed).

If you, being a woman, to whom I am telling this story, should happen to be revelling in the first blush of your youth, you will probably curl your lip over this last page, and think that I am usurping some of your especial privileges in arrogating to a woman of thirty the feelings of ardour and excitement which you imagine applicable only to the first love of sweet seventeen. But though you may not choose to believe it until you reach the same mature age yourself, (which *of course* you will never do unmarried, so you will not have the opportunity of testing the truth of my assertion,) what I said in a previous chapter of Isobel Fane's beauty is as applicable here to her love. As her personal charms had matured and ripened with her womanhood, so had her capability for affection expanded and

increased. If the hopes I have described her as entertaining, the fears I have pictured her as feeling, the expectation, the suspense, and the subsequent disappointment are only fit for more girlish breasts to experience, then I should have written down Isobel Fane's emotions as twice as strong, proceeding as they did from twice as strong a love as any girl could conceive. And the fact which you may think would have created a distance between these two people—the difference in their ages—only made her feelings respecting him the stronger. I believe it is an acknowledged fact that *women* never love so ardently as when the object of their affection is younger than themselves. But though there were five years between Isobel Fane and Rex Reverdon, you would not have thought it to look at them. I have made a long digression here; but perhaps you may remember the point where I broke off. When he put the same question to her relative to the pic-nic that her sister Fanny had done the evening before, namely, how had she enjoyed it, she said frankly, "Very little;" and then he followed it with a searching "Why

not?" and looked her full in the face for an answer. It is a very unpleasant thing to be stared at in a pointed manner when you have been asked a pointed question, particularly when you do not wish to tell the truth, and have any absurd little scruples relative to telling a lie. Isobel blushed as she made an internal search for a judicious reply, and came out in her confusion with a lie after all.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Hadn't you pleasant company?"

"Oh, yes, very."

"And a fine day?"

"Yes, splendid."

"Were you not well, then?"

"Yes, quite. Mr. Reverdon, how pertinacious you are; you would make a capital Q. C. I should be sorry to appear as a witness against myself if you were the counsel for the other side."

"But I never could be that, Miss Fane, unless indeed it was the court of Love you were arraigned at, and I was the unfortunate complainant. I think I should put one question to you then, only one though."

They were riding a little in advance of Mr. Peyton, so that their conversation was not overheard. Isobel wished they had been in the Park at this moment, that she might have proposed a canter, and forced him to take his eyes off her flaming face. But they were attempting to get there by a shorter cut, which existed only in Mr. Reverdon's fancy, but which led them through several back streets of very inferior appearance.

"Oh! take care of that child, Mr. Reverdon!" she exclaimed; although the grinning little urchin, who almost ran between his horse's legs, was in no particular danger. "You might have ridden over him."

"No fear," rejoined her companion. "I fancy that young gentleman has been too well used to look after himself, though there would not have been much harm done if I had sent him to kingdom-come."

Isobel could laugh and talk and be merry with the merriest, but she could never hear any subject that ought to be serious spoken of lightly, and remain silent.

"You shouldn't say that, Mr. Reverdon," she said.

"Why not?" he persisted; "it's truth, isn't it? What can a young beggar like that have to live for—an inheritance of rags, and filth, and hunger, and vice? I declare when they cut across my path, as they have done to-day, I often wish they were all dead, poor little brutes. It sickens one to think of them even."

"It is very wretched," answered Isobel. "I think London is a very heart-breaking place to live in; you see so many sights of the same kind; men, women, and children scarcely looking like the same flesh and blood as yourself, and to feel they might be so much better and happier if people would only work together, and then to remember that you are but one yourself, and can do scarcely anything. Oh! it is very miserable!"

"But how could it be remedied?" said Rex; "it would be impossible to provide for them all, and there can be no happiness without money."

"Don't you think so?" was her quiet remark.

“No. Do you? I mean,” added Rex, not knowing how to explain himself, “no *real* happiness.”

“Oh, Mr. Reverdon!” Isobel burst forth, “that is the only thing, which money *cannot* buy. It conduces to our comfort, of course, and I acknowledge that the want of it is a great evil; but happiness, real happiness, lies in the two great loves—love to our neighbour and—and—

“And what?” asked Rex, interested.

“Love to God,” she said, very softly.

His countenance fell.

“Oh! I don’t know anything about that,” he rejoined, hurriedly; “but as for the other, I thought it was oftener a bore than anything else.”

“Oh, you’ve been spoilt altogether,” she answered, with an affectation of gaiety; but her spirits had been damped by his last remark. “Here is the Park at last, Mr. Reverdon, and now we shall be able to exchange this sober pace for something more lively. Nothing tires me so much as walking my horse.”

Mr. Peyton had not joined at all in this

conversation. He had not even made one of the riding party of his own free will, for he disliked the exercise and playing chaperon to his sister-in-law in equal measure. But there was one thing he disliked more, and that was this apparent continuation between Isobel and Rex Reverdon of the flirtation they had commenced on the evening of the party. It alarmed him. He would not have trusted them alone for a good deal, and therefore he complied with seeming willingness to her request that he should accompany them in their ride. But he sat on pins and needles the while. Every innocent jest between them, every laugh they gave, every look they interchanged, were so many dagger-thrusts to him, and seemed to warn him, for the first time, that the game would not be in his own hands for ever.

When they reached the Row, they announced their intention of having a canter; which was a pace fraught with such imminent danger to Mr. Peyton's equilibrium that he never indulged in it, consequently he was obliged to fall into the rear and content himself with gnashing his

teeth, as he watched their rapid progress, side by side, up and down the most crowded, the most fashionable, and the ugliest-named thoroughfare in Great Britain. Again and again did they pass and re-pass him, as his horse leisurely plodded with him close to the railings; over which the various loungers made their various remarks upon the personal appearance of himself and the animal he rode, without the slightest regard for his feelings.

“Looks like a lawyer, don’t he?” at last exclaimed a wit more discerning than his fellows. “Clap to your pockets, Jim.”

Which remark, being so unluckily true, nettled Mr. Peyton to that degree that he lost his temper completely and never found it again for the rest of the day.

In the meanwhile, my hero and heroine were attracting more notice than they calculated on. From the window of a close carriage drawn by a pair of handsome bays, the hammercloth, harness, and liveries of which all displayed the Huntley crest and colours, appeared the delicate face and luminous eyes of Gabriel, as he gazed

anxiously after them, and then turned to the only other occupant of the vehicle—his mother.

“Mamma, there’s Rex on Sultan riding with a lady, such a pretty woman! with dark hair on a grey horse. Do look, mamma; they’re coming back this way now!”

Lady Charlotte, who, in the pride of her matronly virtue, had no idea that poor Rex could ride with anything feminine that was fit for her to look at, bid Gabriel, sharply, turn his eyes the other way, and leave his brother alone.

“If he’s got friends of his own riding with him, Gabriel, he would just as soon, I dare say, that we should not notice him. He knows the carriage well enough. If he wishes to speak to us, he can do so of his own accord.”

“But I want to speak to him, mamma,” urged the boy. “He never came to Wimbledon as he promised yesterday. Perhaps he wasn’t well.”

“Wasn’t well; pooh!” said Lady Charlotte, with an intonation in her “pooh!” which made Gabriel fire up in anticipation of something worse to come. “Your brother is not used to

being taken ill, my dear, though I dare say he finds it convenient to tell you so sometimes, when he does not keep his promises."

"Rex never says what is untrue," answered Gabriel, hotly.

"So you think," was his mother's contemptuous reply.

An angry flush rose into the boy's face, and he turned towards the carriage window again, to conceal it from her. When his mother spoke of his half-brother in that tone of voice, he almost disliked her.

As his face appeared again, Rex passed and caught sight of it. He reined up in a moment.

"Will you forgive me, Miss Fane? That is my little brother. Holloa, Gaby! how are you?"

The greeting was rough, the abbreviation of his name, to say the least of it, not complimentary; but to Gabriel the salutation sounded like music, and in a moment a smile had broke out over the pale features of the boy, which lighted them up like a ray of sunshine. Isobel had also stopped her horse, but she stood a little apart

from the carriage, not knowing the occupants of it.

"Oh, Rex ! I am so glad to see you."

"I should have passed the carriage, Gabriel, if I hadn't seen your big eyes staring at me out of the window. Holloa, mother ! is that you ?" he asked, on catching a glimpse (for which he had to stoop considerably) of Lady Charlotte's figure, by the side of her son ; and then recollecting Isobel and the awkward position he had placed her in, he turned and said,—

"Miss Fane, will you allow me to make you known to my mother ?" and interpreting her bow as consent, continued, "Mother, let me introduce Miss Fane to you. Lady Charlotte Huntley, Miss Fane."

Lady Charlotte, who had set poor Isobel down as a "pretty horse-breaker," without the least scruple of conscience, had only just time to smother the indignation which was rising at her son's supposed insult, by stopping to speak to her under such circumstances, and exchange it for her most gracious bow in acknowledgment of the introduction. For the heiress, Miss Fane,

was known to her by name, and Lady Charlotte, like many other tolerably good people, had a great respect for heirs and heiresses, and anything which went chink-a-chink.

She was delighted to have the opportunity of making Miss Fane's acquaintance; had heard so often of her from her son, Mr. Reverdon (at which, though quite a romance on Lady Charlotte's part, poor Isobel looked very pleased, taking it all for gospel); had no idea Miss Fane cultivated horse-exercise; should be so charmed if she would look in upon them at Wimbledon some day, when she was out riding, &c., &c., &c.

To which, for answer, of course, Miss Fane was equally pleased to have seen Lady Charlotte Huntley, and would be delighted to take the first opportunity, &c.

Which, however, was much truer on the part of Isobel than it had been on that of the other; for she was pleased with the amiable notice of Rex Reverdon's mother, and anxious to cultivate the acquaintance.

And in the meanwhile the dark eyes of

Gabriel were fixed upon her as she spoke, as if he was devouring every word she said.

A few more commonplaces, and then Miss Fane was really afraid she must rejoin her brother-in-law, or he would think her lost.

"But don't let me take you away from Lady Charlotte, Mr. Reverdon. I should like to ride up and down once or twice more. You could join us afterwards."

But Mr. Reverdon would not hear of a dissolution of partnership; he *could* not permit her to go by herself; and so the farewells were exchanged, and the equestrians prepared to move away.

"Rex, you are *really* coming down to us to-morrow, ain't you?" were Gabriel's parting words to his brother.

"Really and truly, Gabriel, unless I am dead first."

"In which extreme case I'll excuse you," was the boy's laughing reply, as the horses moved off.

"That's a dear little fellow, Miss Fane," said Rex, as they joined Mr. Peyton, and

commenced their journey homewards, "though you might not think so at first sight."

"I can quite think so," she answered, warmly ; "he has a most interesting face. How fond he appears of you, Mr. Reverdon."

"Yes, he is fond of me, I believe, poor little chap," was the reply. "The only creature in the world who has the bad taste to love me, Miss Fane," and his cobalt eyes turned a long, searching glance upon her, as he spoke.

What could the woman think but that at least he had commenced to feel an interest in her ?

I have scarcely patience to write this part of my story ; scarcely patience to detail to you the thousand and one little words, looks, and actions by which Rex Reverdon led Isobel Fane on to believe he cared for her, at the very time his whole heart was wrapt up in another woman. He was used in after days, when the sacrifice he had led her into committing for his sake was fully completed, to pride himself upon the empty boast, that he had never once during the course of their

courtship told her downright that he loved her. He was used, in consequence, to lay the flattering unction to his soul, that the sin of deception could not be laid at his door. And yet from the first moment that he designed to ask her hand in marriage his conduct was such, as to render a direct avowal of love, when the time came for his proposal, unnecessary. The heart of Isobel Fane was fresh and unsullied, notwithstanding her thirty years; her disposition was frank and open; and she judged the heart of others by her own. And yet, I must say so far for Rex Reverdon, that he was not laying himself out wilfully to charm her. He was scarcely aware that his little attentions and whispered gallantries were so very charming: perhaps they would not have appeared so to a woman who had not already lost her heart to him. But he had a great issue at stake, and here was his only chance of deliverance. A certain amount of courtship was necessary before he could speak of marriage. Rex himself thought his attentions to Miss Fane were very commonplace, and

such as any woman would claim from any man. Perhaps it was her love and hope (which scarcely could believe itself to be such) which exaggerated them in Isobel's eyes. Anyway, it was a wretched business; and, whichever was in fault, they both paid the full penalty of it before their race was run. At this period *she* had certainly the best of it; for poor Rex was as miserable as he well could be.

That night, meeting his friend Halkett at some favourite place of midnight resort for the young and careless of his sex, he drew him aside for a few words of private conversation.

"I've seen my landlord to-day, Halkett, and got him to take the place in South Street off my hands. I'm going to have a sale there of all my things,—except the pictures, they must go to Christie and Manson's,—and I'm going into the Club Chambers next week."

"The best thing you could do, old boy," was his friend's reply.

"Yes, hang it! if I'd only contented myself with them all along, I might not have been in this pickle now. However, with what I have,

and the sale, I shall be able to keep my head above water till something turns up."

"How do you get on there?" said Halkett, with a movement of his head towards the door of the café, which was intended to intimate Torrington Square.

"Pretty well," was the answer. "I was out riding with her to-day."

"You went in rather strong there the other night, old fellow," observed his friend. "I thought it would be all settled before we left."

Rex made a gesture of impatience.

"Don't talk of her," he said, in much the same tone as he had used in making the request to Miss Ashton; and then, turning to Mr. Halkett quickly, he added, "Halkett, I've parted with Pearl; I'm not going there any more; I told her so yesterday."

His friend did not say he was a fool this time, as he had done on a previous occasion, whatever he thought. Balancing himself on the back of a chair, he only commenced his favourite diversion of examining his filbert nails, dismissing each separate one from observation

with a peculiar *click*, which set his hearer's teeth on edge.

"I *can't* go there any more," resumed Rex, hotly, as he observed the other's indifferent manner; "and if you knew what I felt, you wouldn't advise me to do so either. I had no idea I was so far gone in that quarter. But, Halkett, you go there sometimes, don't you? I want you to look after them for me like a good fellow as you are, and see that they want for nothing. As long as I have a penny in my purse she shall have half of it."

If poor Rex had only known how often Halkett went there, how familiar to him was the road which led to the little house at Islington, he would not have been so eager, perhaps, to make him his almoner for the benefit of Miss Elizabeth Ashton. But the friends had occasionally paid visits there together, and Rex thought that they were the extent of Henry Halkett's intimacy with the woman he loved.

"They'll get on well enough, Rex; and if not, Miss Ashton will doubtless let you know. I

suppose your sense of the virtuous is not so fine, as to have forbidden all communication by letter between you."

Rex didn't like being laughed at, and he showed it by his looks.

"I never mentioned the subject to her," he answered, shortly; "but as we have never corresponded, I don't suppose she will commence it now. I told her, I was thinking of marrying."

"Oh! well! I shall be delighted I am sure, my dear fellow, to be your Mercury, between Islington and —— wherever you may hang out; and let you know whenever there seems need of your help."

"She might be shy of telling you, Halkett," (ah, how little did Rex Reverdon know yet of Elizabeth Ashton!) "being a stranger, but you will be able to judge for yourself, won't you, whether she looks well or ill; and how that drunken old brute, her father, treats her. You will take care of her for me, and I shall be everlastingly your debtor," added poor Rex, as he grasped Mr. Halkett's hand.

"Nonsense, man," replied his friend, really

looking ashamed of the proceeding, "what's the use of making such a d—d fuss about nothing."

"It isn't *nothing*," rejoined Rex; "it is a great deal to me, and there is not another man in the world that I would trust to do it for me."

"Ah! poor Pearl!" said Mr. Halkett; "so pretty as she is, and so badly off. She would stand a poor chance, I am afraid, with a man of no principle!"

"I'd like to see the man of no principle, or all principle," exclaimed Rex, firing up (and talking nonsense, in his heat) "who'd dare to try it on! I mayn't go near her myself, but I shall keep my eye on her, and—by Jove! he'd better let me catch him at it."

And Rex's hand, as it was clenched against an imaginary rival, came very near to the nose of his particular friend.

"Oh! come, my dear fellow," exclaimed Halkett, laughing, "you needn't put my eye out; I am not the man." And then he sobered immediately.

"Halkett, I am a fool," he said, which was

the usual conclusion he arrived at after any expression of his feelings, "let's change the subject or go into the billiard-room. I feel rather mad to-night, and am just in the mood to stake everything I possess. Come, Hal! I'll play you for Miss Fane! A thousand up; and a couple of hundred points into the bargain; the winner to cut the other's throat! By heavens, if the thing *could* be done, how thankfully I'd lose!"

And I think if the woman whose name he mentioned so lightly could have seen him a few hours afterwards, when the wretched young man had drunk deeply to drown the unusual sense of pain which was bearing him down to the earth, and the fatal spirits had mounted to his brain, destroying his senses, and with them his good-breeding, until neither the words he uttered, nor the actions he committed, were fit to be linked with the name of "gentleman"—that Rex Reverdon would very likely never have become Isobel Fane's husband. But if that had been the case, my story would never have been written, though whether you would have

been gainers or losers by the fact yourselves can best determine.

Lucky you, to be free agents. I must go on writing, in the dark as it were, lighted occasionally on my way, perhaps, by a faint hope, but still uncertain whether your hands will be raised in clapping or your voices in groans when the curtain falls upon my efforts. But you are not obliged even to accompany me to the end, you can give a look of supreme disgust, an ejaculation of contempt if you will; send the book back to the library, and get another instead. Again I say, lucky you!

But Isobel had something to bear that evening also, for Mr. Peyton's ill temper did not vanish even at the appearance of dinner (it must have been a bad one indeed, taking his sex into consideration), and he amused himself, all the evening by abusing Mr. Reginald Reverdon; whilst his sister-in-law had not even the satisfaction of feeling that she had any right as yet to take up the cudgels in his defence, else she was a woman who *could* fight right loyally for the ones she loved, especially in their

absence. "Conceited young fool he is," remarked Mr. Peyton once in reference to our hero, "I wonder, what on earth he wants to come riding with you for, Isobel; he thinks too much of his own lumbering figure and bush of hair, I should think, to have much time for observing the perfections of other people." (Which last sentence, considering that Mr. Peyton was small and spare, and that his hair was thin and turning grey, might have been interpreted as a little touch of the green-eyed monster, if his friends had not known him too well.)

"All the better, perhaps," she answered gaily, "when 'other people' have so few to observe."

She felt disposed to be gay. Her brother-in-law's ill-temper only amused her, and the events of the afternoon had left her in unusually good spirits again.

"He is a most unprincipled young fellow," Mr. Peyton went on to say; "not at all the sort of man I should like to see you about with often. Isobel, I shall certainly not encourage his visits here; I beg you don't ride with him again."

“He asked me to do so the day after tomorrow,” she answered, “and I promised I would.”

“I never heard of such a thing!” exclaimed Mr. Peyton, rising from his seat in his annoyance, and pacing the room like a restless weasel or stoat, or some such small, wriggling unpleasant animal, “scampering about, day after day, with a young man like that! It’s not respectable—its disreputable—you’ll get talked about; I won’t allow it,” he added, as he turned round and snapped his eyes at her, with an expression that was intended to be very fierce.

She simply laughed.

“Come, Fred,” she said, soothingly, as we speak to a child or a tipsy man, “sit down, and don’t make an exhibition of yourself. You know me of old; all this won’t alter matters.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you intend to ride with Mr. Reverdon the day after tomorrow?” he said, stopping short before her chair, as he slowly brought out his words.

“Yes—I do,” she answered coolly. You would have expected an alarming outburst to follow

such an answer to such a solemnly put question, but nothing of the sort came. Mr. Peyton knew very well that he was powerless, he had no authority for directing the actions of his sister-in-law, and if he made her angry it would be the worse for himself. So he only looked at her for a moment, puffed and blew considerably, got red in the face, took out his pocket-handkerchief, and began playing "pop goes the weasel" again. In which style their arguments invariably ended.

"You shouldn't speak to Fred like that, Isobel," observed Mrs. Peyton, almost in tears, she knew not for what. "He knows better than you do; and it is very extraordinary of you and Mr. Reverdon, and not at all proper."

"What is extraordinary?" exclaimed Isobel, with rising temper. "Why is it not proper? Do you think, at my age, that I am never to choose my own friends, or follow my own pursuits? As to its being improper, I am the best judge of that. If Fred doesn't like to accompany me in my rides, he can stay at home. I dare say I can get some one else. But if you and he think to

control me all my life, and to order my actions as if I was a child, I tell you at once I won't stand it. If I am not to have my own way in this house, I shall go where I can." And so she left them, staring at one another in blank astonishment at this unprecedented act of open rebellion on the part of the usually forbearing Isobel, and wondering, in their own hearts, what it could possibly portend.

CHAPTER XI.

LUCY.

NINE o'clock the next morning; and the sun was shining with such assurance into the breakfast-room of a moderately-sized villa at Ealing, that the old servant who was putting the last touches to the arrangement of the breakfast-table pulled down the long white blind in his face without the slightest ceremony.

“Drat that sun!” she exclaimed, rather irreverently, as she brought the white cotton tassel down with a jerk; “it won’t leave a bit of colour in the carpet by the time summer’s over.”

The room was prettily furnished, and bore ample traces of being the abode of a gentlewoman; but there was a primness about the settlement of the furniture, an absence of negligent grace about the disposition of the various little ornaments which adorned it, which proved

that its arrangement was left, as was the case, to the hands of servants only.

Indeed, as the old woman in question moved slowly about the apartment with a duster in her hand, gently wiping a book or blowing the dust off a glass shade, she did so with the air of a proprietress, and as if everything the room contained was being set in order for her own edification; as indeed it was, for there were few else in the house to care much how it looked.

Presently the door of an upstairs room slammed, and light footsteps were heard coming down the stairs, accompanied by a gay whistle. What a jolly boy that must be! You could almost tell it by his voice—so clear, and strong, and sweet—as he whistles the martial air of the “Dashing White Sergeant.” There is a decision, too, in the manner in which he marks the time, which tells of something more than the materials for a musician—of an energy of character which will make him do what he does do well, and prevent his going slipshod through the journey of life. As the footsteps reached the landing they suddenly ceased, and I am

afraid the rest of the journey was performed by the whistler on the balustrades ; for nothing more was heard till the little hall reverberated with the final jump on its floor-cloth, which elicited a start from the old woman in the midst of her dusting, and an exclamation of “Bless her heart !” as the breakfast-room door was thrown open, and Miss Lucy Halkett entered. And this was the “boy” we have been speculating on !

Tall of her age—which was sixteen—fair, and fresh, and slim, Lucy Halkett gave sufficient promise of future womanly charms to have occupied the place of a first-class heroine in my pages, though here she only ranks as third. But it is not given to all to distinguish themselves in the foremost ranks of the battle, though many drop and die in the rear unseen. But we will trust no such fate is in store for the joyous creature before us ; for on this June morning she was especially joyous.

“Holloa, old woman !” she exclaimed, as she rushed up to the servant in attendance, and threw her arms round her neck from behind ; “what do you mean by not calling me in time ?

Hére's nine o'clock, and I ought to be gone. I'll squeeze you to death ;" and suiting the action to the word, she set the woman off into a fit of coughing which seemed likely to prove the accomplishment of her threat.

"Lor, bless you, my dear !" she said, as soon as she could speak, "I called you three times, but you only threw things at me—you did ; and so I came down to my dusting. Now, you sit down to your breakfast like a good girl, and you'll be in lots of time."

For the old servant had been nurse to Lucy Halkett's orphaned babyhood, and was as familiar with her as her own mother might have been. The girl gave her a parting shake, and then turned her attention to the table.

"No coffee, you old wretch !" she exclaimed, flying at the tea-pot, "and no jam. What do you mean by it ? I won't eat eggs. I hate them."

"Lor, Miss Lucy ! the coffee's every bit run out, and there ain't no time of a morning to send for it and then make it. You must have tea, my lamb, to-day ; but there's something else there that you'll like." And she pointed to a plate

set on a slop-basin full of hot water, and covered with a round dish-cover.

“Buttered toast!” cried the girl. “There’s an old darling! Come along, Nurse! sit down and pour out the tea, and put in lots of sugar, while I make acquaintance with the toast.”

The old woman suffered herself to be dragged to a chair, and forced into it, whilst Miss Lucy Halkett installed herself opposite, and finished whistling the “Dashing White Sergeant.”

“Have you been to see your grandmamma yet, Miss Lucy?” enquired the nurse, presently, as she handed over a cup of tea, half full of white sugar.

“Not yet,” answered the girl, her mouth full of buttered toast. She did not eat greedily, but only hastily—all her actions were quick and energetic. “I must run up and see Gran before I go. Strap all my books together, Nurse; and mind you do them tight.” The school books were here, there, and everywhere; but they were collected at last, under the young lady’s directions, and made into a parcel by means of a strong leather strap and buckle.

“Give me that one, Nurse,” she exclaimed

presently, as an ominously dry-looking volume was about to be added to the rest—"that fat brute with the gingerbread cover. I've never even looked at it;" and she held her buttered toast in one hand, whilst she perused her day's task of heathen mythology, giving it sudden mighty thumps with the other every second or so, to express her disapprobation of the author and the work.

"I forgot all about this horrid mythology business," she exclaimed, presently, as a more vehement thump than before made the nurse jump in the pursuance of her occupation; "that beast Parsons will turn me in it, I'm sure."

"Oh, for shame, Miss Lucy!" said the nurse, very gravely, "to speak of your governess in that fashion: 'tisn't like a lady, my dear, to call people *beasts*, nor a Christian either."

"Well, she *is* a beast," returned the imperturbable Lucy. "What is it that the horrid creatures who want to laugh at that dear darling love, Lytton Bulwer, say about his writing of the beautiful, eh, Nursey?"

The woman shook her head.

“I’m sure I don’t know nothing, Miss Lucy dear, about Lytton Bulwers, nor any other Bulwers, whatever they may be.”

“Oh, you dear old goose,” said the girl, laughing; “why they said he wrote of the beautiful with a big B; and why shouldn’t he, when he wanted to draw every one’s attention to what he had to say of it? Now, if I was writing about Parsons, I should do just the same,—write her down a beast with a big B, and serve her right too.”

“*Miss Parsons*, you mean, Miss Lucy,” observed the nurse, quietly.

“No, I don’t mean *Miss Parsons*, Miss Lucy,” echoed the girl, mimicking her tone of voice, “and so you’re out, Mrs. Nurse. I mean Parsons—plain Parsons, and the most horrid wretch of a governess that ever girl was plagued with. Jubilate! there’s the postman;” and as the double knock sounded at the door, she leapt up from her seat, and was in the hall, ready to pick up the letters, almost as they fell upon the door-mat.

She came back slower than she went, a bright

colour in her face, and two letters in her hands. She threw one to the servant as she entered.

“One for Gran,” she said, and commenced fingering the other as she spoke.

“Is that one for you, my dear?” said the woman, presently.

“Of course it is,” she answered; “do you think it’s for you? Oh, did it expect a billet-doux from its sweetheart, the poor old thing? and is it ready to cry its eyes out because it hasn’t come?”

She put her arms round her nurse’s neck as she spoke with a pretension of loud lamenting, but in reality to prevent any questions about the letter she had received. But the old servant was not to be hoodwinked.

“Sweethearts! nonsense, Miss Lucy,” she said, as she smoothed down her ruffled collar and cap. “I should think sweethearts was as little in my thoughts as they are in yours, and you ought to know it.”

The girl was impatient to open her letter, and yet she did not.

“Come, you cut along to Gran,” she said to

the nurse, "and give her her letter, and then bring me down my hat and cloak, for it's half-past nine, and Parsons will fine me."

As the woman walked slowly up the stairs, she thought to herself, "What's come to that child that she can't open Master Henry's letters before me as she used to do?"

And as the girl found herself alone, she looked round once with a guilty glance to see if the door was really closed, and then, seizing the letter in her hand, she pressed it to her lips as she tore it open. It was only a few lines, but they brought the bright blood quickly to her cheeks, and then she kissed the paper again, and, crumpling it up, thrust it into her pocket.

Before the nurse had hardly reached her mistress' bedroom door, she was overtaken by her nursling, who came after her three steps at a time, and rushed into the room before her.

It was a comfortable bedroom, though plainly furnished. In the centre a large mahogany bedstead, with moreen hangings drawn closely around it, seemed almost to fill the apartment with its pompous proportions. Lucy darted

round the moreen curtains to the side where they were left open to the light, and coming with her usual vehemence upon its occupant, made her jump almost as much as she had done the old nurse.

She was a little old lady, very fragile and weak-looking, but with the power still of bringing a light into her eyes, and a flush of pleasure on her withered cheek, as the figure of her young grand-daughter came upon her view.

“Well, Gran, how are you?” said the girl, as she half threw herself upon the bed, and kissed and hugged the old lady.

Mrs. Halkett’s imposing nightcap, with its frills of cambric and Valenciennes, was knocked completely on one side by the process; but she re-arranged it with a systematic composure, from which one might surmise that the occurrence was not an unusual one with her.

“Quite well, my dear child. Was not that the postman’s knock? Are there any letters for me?”

“Nurse’s got one for you, Granny, and here

she is with it. Do you know I must be off; it's half-past nine."

"Then go, dear Lucy, at once. Miss Parsons does not like you to be unpunctual."

A smile curled up the girl's lip as her grandmother spoke, but still she lingered, though the servant had brought her hat and cloak by that time, and she had put them on. Twice she moved slowly round the bedstead, and twice she as slowly returned.

"Come, Lucy," said Mrs. Halkett, presently, lifting her spectacled eyes from her letter, "are you not going, my child?"

"Yes I am, Gran, now directly;" and she passed beyond the drawn curtains. "I say, Gran," she exclaimed, from beyond them, "Harry's coming down to-day."

"What!" said Mrs. Halkett, "your cousin Henry? How did you hear it, Lucy?"

"Only a line he sent to me, Gran; he'll be down to dinner at two. Good-bye."

"But, Lucy, my dear," commenced Mrs. Halkett, but to little effect. The light footsteps went springing down the stairs again, and in

another moment the hall-door had slammed, and she knew the girl was gone.

“So strange of the dear child,” thought the old lady, as she returned to the perusal of her interrupted letter, “not to have told me before, or to say if Henry sent any message to me about his coming. Ah! she’s a wild creature,” and therewith forgot the subject, except so far as regarded her communicating the news of the proposed advent (which was a thing of frequent occurrence) to the old servant, who, in her turn, was too well-bred to make any comments upon Miss Lucy’s behaviour, except in her own mind.

As the girl herself took her way along the half-countrified roads of Ealing, in order to reach the school she daily attended, swinging her packet of books in one hand as she went, she looked what she was—a thorough school-girl. Wild and thoughtless by reason of her extreme youth, and a little by reason of her nature; spoilt to a degree by the two old women who had had the sole charge of her from her infancy, Lucy Halkett had at this time little idea of ever restraining either her words or actions. What

she wished to say she said without much respect of persons. What she felt inclined to do she did, and if she could not do it by fair means she thought little of doing it by foul. Her grandmother and nurse, whilst they flattered and petted and idolized her, were no companions for her young, free, joyous nature, and she had grown lately to think she must act for herself without any reference to them; to think that she must live in a little world of her own, since they could not enter into the pleasures which she did. She ruled the villa at Ealing, and though they shook their heads over her wild sayings and doings, and prognosticated that she would break her neck some day over the balustrades, or shock the other sex so much by the freedom of her remarks and manners, that the *awful* fate of "never getting married" would assuredly be hers, neither grandmother nor nurse dared to oppose more than the feeblest remonstrance to anything she did or said. Lucy Halkett was most thoroughly and effectually what people call *spoilt*; though in what "spoiling" consists time alone can show.

As she walked along to school that morning, she had to pass a long line of semi-detached villas, such as their own, before she got clear of the terrace on which they lived. Several salutations were hers as she went ; vehement rappings from upstairs windows on the part of young gentlemen who had persuaded their mammas (paterfamilias having already taken his way to the City) to permit them to stay from school for that day only : ostensibly for a head-ache or a festered thumb ; in reality, for cricket or a game at hockey. Some carried their admiration sufficiently far as to run down the garden path at her approach, betraying that they had been on the look-out for their goddess, and exchange a few words with her over the garden gate ; and one young knight of about her own age was surprised leaning over the battlements of his ancestral halls, in an attitude of utter despondency, and with eyes of despairing import, as he suffered himself to be silently devoured by his consuming passion. But Lucy had a word and a joke for each of them, and as she came against the last-mentioned gentleman she laughed in a

cruel and heartless manner at the symptoms he betrayed, and when he reproached her with being the cause of his depression, her heavy bundle of books in its leather strap came swinging round at him for answer. The insult was too much for him to bear. Even Petrarch, Romeo, Antony, all the lovers in creation, would have ceased worshipping when a lot of books were swung round at their heads. The boy vaulted the long wall he had leant over, and gave chase at once. But Lucy Halkett had the speed of an antelope, and with her advantage she outran him, or rather, the little gate of Miss Parsons' abode, with its brass plate with "Establishment for Young Ladies" upon it, closed upon her before he could overtake her. Her saucy laugh of defiance came back to him as he retraced his steps.

"The rascal!" he said to himself as she did so. "I'll pay her out as she comes back, if I lay in wait an hour for her." And then went home to forget in half an hour the insult his tender passion had received, and to commence adoring more ardently than before.

Miss Lucy Halkett was received with great *empressement* by her little world at Miss Parsons'. She was one of the "big girls" at the school, and evidently a universal favourite. After she had been reprimanded for being late by her governess—a reprimand, of which, I am afraid, she took little notice—she settled down in her seat, and there was great manœuvring as to who should get next to her for some little while, until her great chum, Miss Addy Wilson, secured the desirable position.

"Young ladies," said the measured tones of Miss Parsons' assistant, presently, "why are you all changing your places? Miss Halkett has her own desk; there's no occasion for any confusion. The class for mythology to come up at once."

Of course the class for mythology, or at all events that section of it which was represented by Miss Lucy Halkett, was what scholars technically call "turned."

"Have you not studied your mythology, Miss Halkett?" demanded the preceptress.

"I can't say I have," was the cool reply; whilst the other girls of the class, afraid to titter,

looked on with beaming admiration at the impudence which they would not have ventured to utter themselves.

Miss Parsons removed her spectacles from her nose, and looked the offender full in the face.

"You cannot say that you have, Miss Halkett? Do I hear you aright?"

"Quite right," answered the girl. "I slept till half-past eight this morning, and had only just time to eat my breakfast."

"And last evening, Miss Halkett?"

"Last evening?" was the answer, and the girl's eyes went round as if she were trying to tax her memory with the events of the evening before. "Oh! I was very busy about something or other, I forget what now."

"This is very unprecedented behaviour, Miss Halkett," rejoined the governess, getting hot, "and you set a very bad example to the whole class. Go to your seat at once, if you please, and study your part. I shall expect to hear it perfect in a quarter of an hour. I must communicate with Mrs. Halkett upon your indolence

in acquiring your appointed tasks. Young ladies, go on with the class as before. In what way did the goddess Diana show the indignation that she felt at the assurance of Actæon?"

Lucy Halkett returned to her seat, but I am afraid she employed her time in anything but studying her neglected mythology.

"She dare not keep me in, the old wretch," she thought to herself, "because Gran has forbidden her to do so; and so, if she wishes me to sit here all the morning, instead of doing my other lessons, all right; I prefer it myself." And that portion of Miss Lucy Halkett's mythology is illustrated to this day with the most wonderful sketches of gods and goddesses, and hounds and deer;—proofs of the profitable manner in which she spent the time allotted to her for redeeming what she had lost. Presently, in drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, a crushed envelope came out with it, which made the girlish heart beat faster. She would have *one* little look at the handwriting—only one—indeed, she had read the note so hastily, she scarcely remembered what was in it; so she

brought it out furtively, and opened it and placed it between the pages of her mythology, whilst she read the few words it contained over and over again. They must have engrossed her very much, for Miss Parsons rose from her seat and came behind her, before she was aware of the circumstance.

"Miss Halkett, what is that letter you are reading?"

Lucy started, and laid her hand upon her precious missive.

"It's only a letter of my own," she answered, hastily.

"I shall be obliged by your giving it to me," returned the governess; "I allow no young ladies to receive or read letters during the school hours."

"I've not received it during the school-hours, and I am not reading it during the school-hours," replied Lucy, with a heightened colour, as she thrust the letter again into her pocket.

"Nevertheless, Miss Halkett, I insist upon seeing that letter; you will give it me at once, if you please."

Lucy was about to dispute the point, but in the first place, she knew it would be of no use in the end, and in the second, she foresaw that a sight of the note would perhaps enrage Miss Parsons more than anything else ; so she tossed it to her with rather a defiant air, as she said :—

“Oh ! you’re quite welcome to read it, Miss Parsons ; I dare say you’ve never seen a love-letter before.”

The expression of the eyes—the compassionate tone of the voice—were impudence itself ; and Lucy had ample revenge, if that is what she sought for. Miss Parsons trembled with rage as she adjusted her spectacles, and perused the note delivered to her.

It was as follows :—

“DEAREST LUCY—

“I am going to run over, to-morrow by the 2.2 ; will my Butterfly come down to the station and meet her old Hal ?”

And then there was a hurried signature of two initials, which might have been H. H. or

W. W. or any other letters in the alphabet. The governess read the brief note two or three times over, whilst the girl looked up in her face all the while. When she had finished, she said, as she refolded the paper and placed it in its envelope—

"And pray, Miss Halkett, may I enquire the name of the writer of this very strange epistle?"

"Oh dear no!" said the girl, decidedly, "that's my business."

Miss Parsons opened her eyes in astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me, Miss Halkett, that you refuse to say who is the individual with whom you correspond in this familiar style?"

"Most certainly," returned the girl. "Good heavens, Miss Parsons! what! kiss and tell?" "No,"—she added, while she slowly shook her girlish head with the air of an old woman, "No; that isn't my motto."

The three preceptresses were horrified. Such an act of rebellion in the very midst of the school-girls—in their very faces! It was not to

be tolerated. Every eye in the room was wide open, every ear alert; every little heart beating with envy for the recipient of a real love-letter. Miss Halkett must be made an example of. She must be made to *remember*. And so assuming an air of intense frigidity, whilst her eye went round the whole circle, as much as to say, "so perish all traitors," Miss Parsons placed the letter, with a great assumption of executive justice, in her pocket, as she said, "Miss Halkett, I retain this letter, and shall communicate with your grandmamma upon the subject."

Did she expect to see her wayward pupil fall at her feet, and implore her to keep silence, and the offence should never be repeated? Did she expect her to vow an immediate reformation, and give up the name of her correspondent (to ascertain which, indeed, Miss Parsons was painfully curious) on the spot? If she did, she was disappointed. In the silence which ensued, Lucy Halkett's voice rang out, clear and saucy as usual.

"So you may, if you like," she said, "I've

got lots more at home ;” and she turned again to her desk as she spoke.

Miss Parsons was vanquished — her grand eloquence had been set at nought, and her weapons turned against herself, so she had no resource but tears, which she began to shed copiously ;—“ Wicked ungrateful girl,” was all she said, gaspingly ; whilst the two assistants echoed her cry. “ And after all my care too ;” and then found herself obliged to leave the room in search of luncheon and sherry, which she always found necessary to take in at least twice between breakfast and dinner, to keep up her strength. As soon as she had left the room, Lucy Halkett found herself the heroine of the day. It was of no manner of use the two assistants requesting the young ladies not to whisper, or to change their seats. The subject was too exciting, they found no attention paid to themselves at all.

“ Oh, do tell me all about him, dear,” said Miss Addy Wilson, who by reason of being chief friend to Miss Halkett, thought she *ought* to be told ; “ is he dark or fair ? I wish that

old cat had read the letter aloud. How I wish I was you, dear !”

But Lucy’s ruse had answered her purpose ; she had no wish to keep up the deception with her school-fellows.

“What nonsense, Addy,” she said, in whispered answer, “it’s only a letter, from my cousin Henry. I pretended it was a love-letter, to pay out that wretch for daring to read it.”

“What fun !” said the girl. “But he *is* very nice, your cousin, Lucy. Such nice dark eyes and hair ! I think he’s such a fine man—and cousins *do* marry sometimes, Lucy, you know—I’m sure I’m quite in love with yours myself. Now don’t you think he’s very sweet ?”

“Is he ? I don’t know,” replied Lucy, but she reddened as she spoke ; “he’s my own cousin you know, Addy, almost like my brother. Grandmamma says that if she were to die, there would be no one to look after me but Henry.”

“Oh, that would be charming,” returned her friend ; “then you could go and live with him, and you would grow melancholy and pale, and then he would discover, one day, that it was for

love of him, and he would confess that he was dying of love for you, and then you would marry each other and live happily ever afterwards. What fun!”

“Nonsense!” said Lucy; but she looked pleased.

As she sat silent afterwards, she found herself wondering if it ever would come to pass; and how it would feel to live with him always. But then poor old Gran must die first! and at the thought the tears rushed from the girl's affectionate heart to her eyes, and the words in the book before her grew indistinct, and changed their places.

But all that was gone before school was broken up. What mattered it to Lucy that “Parsons” dismissed her in chilling silence, and as if she were attending her funeral. Half-past one o'clock, and she should just have time to walk down to the station and linger about there until the 2.2 train had come in. Not on the platform, Gran wouldn't like that—and Lucy, though wild, was not disobedient—but just outside the station, where she might watch the

arrived passengers pass the gate as they delivered up their tickets. She reached the spot sooner than she anticipated, she was so afraid of being late; and the fifteen minutes she had to wait seemed very long indeed. Then, when the clock was just at the five minutes past, and the train was not come, she thought an accident might have occurred, until a friendly porter, crossing the road after his dinner, informed her it was a very usual occurrence. Seven minutes past, and there it was really, rushing into the station as if it meant to pass it altogether, and then pulling up short at the last minute. Lucy stopped on the opposite pavement, gazing wistfully at the passengers as they commenced to emerge from the ticket-taker's hands. All women,—no, two men, common men. Oh, she dare-say-ed he hadn't come after all—perhaps he missed the train, or—— When, lo! a figure passed the wicket hastily; and Lucy's childish face (and shall I say, Lucy's childish heart) flared up with a glowing welcome, as Henry Halkett distinguished her waiting form at once, and came across the road to her. *He* did not

appear moved at the encounter, though he evidently remarked the girl's emotion, and was pleased at it. He held the hand she gave him for a long time, and squeezed it as he looked in her face.

"Well, Butterfly," he said, "so you've managed to fly down here to pick me up."

"Oh, Harry!" she said, whilst pleasure appeared upon every feature, "I got your note this morning, and of course I came."

"How's the old lady, Lucy?"

"Gran's quite well," the girl answered; "at least as well as she ever is. You haven't got a carpet bag, Harry," she said, presently, with a look of disappointment.

"No, my pet," he replied, "I can't stay over the evening. I only ran down to see you. Did you tell grandmamma I was coming?"

"Yes, I did," said Lucy,—but she blushed as she remembered how scanty had been the information on the subject,—“but only just before I went to school. I think she heard me.”

"You mustn't tell her you came down to meet me at the station," he said, presently.

“But why not?” urged Lucy. “I must if she asks me, Harry.”

“Say I met you coming from school.”

But she wouldn't agree to that. She wished he hadn't suggested it; but she only said—

“Gran is not likely to ask anything about it, Harry; and if she did, she never scolds me.”

So they returned together; but the old nurse, who opened the door to them, did not look pleased at the circumstance, although Mr. Henry was almost as well known to her as her nursling was. The afternoon was spent by Lucy at home. No one said it might be so—she asked no one, in fact, whether it was to be so; she simply decided the question herself. Henry was come, and therefore *of course* she was not going to school; she was going for a walk with him. I do not know if Mr. Henry Halkett was particularly fond, in general, of walks amongst green fields, and down country roads, and bye-lanes; I think the pavements of Regent Street, the shade of the Burlington, and the seclusion of the Hay-

market were a great deal more to his taste in particular, and in accordance with his habits in general: but this afternoon he suffered himself to be led by his young cousin into the most rural of districts without a murmur; indeed, he voted for it before he set out with her.

"Take me somewhere for a quiet walk, Lucy, where a fellow can smoke a cigar without meeting half Ealing to stare at him;" and she had done as he had directed her to do.

She looked especially girlish this afternoon, with her skirts still clearing her ancles, her slight unformed figure, with its printed cotton dress, and her head covered with a plain straw hat.

When they had wandered away from the place itself, and had lost sight of cockney villas and cottages in a series of grassy fields, Henry Halkett threw himself on the ground, as he commenced smoking, and Lucy sat down beside him. Presently, he put his arm round her waist and drew her towards himself. She glanced round at him in a shy manner as he did so, which caused him to remove his cigar

from between his lips and kiss her. Then she coloured up again, and tried to edge herself away from his encircling arm.

“What’s the matter, Butterfly?” he said, laughing, “ain’t you comfortable?”

“Yes,” she answered; “but——” And then she stopped, unable to say what she wanted or did not want. He had known her ever since she was a baby; he had been accustomed to kiss her always,—there was nothing in it,—or she used to think there was nothing in it; now—she did not know why—but there seemed a difference. And yet she loved him just as well as ever.

He read her thoughts better than she could herself.

“Lucy doesn’t care any more for her poor old cousin!” he said, presently.

Then she turned and hid her face against his, and kissed him several times; but as she did so she blushed again and again, till her face was scarlet.

“You know I do, Hal,” she said. “Oh, don’t say that!”

And then he held her hand, though it trembled the whole time beneath his pressure, whilst he made her tell him all about Miss Parsons and her school, and the fate of her letter.

“She thought it was a love-letter,” she said, with glee, as she ended her recital.

“Was she wrong, Butterfly?” said the man beside her.

The question (which sounded to the girl’s unsophisticated heart like question and answer in one) fell on her ear like some delicious surprise. For the moment she felt giddy and confused: her eyes swam; strange noises were surging in her head; she couldn’t think or understand. Then they all cleared away, and she was Lucy Halkett again, sitting in the summer fields with her old cousin Harry beside her. Why had she thought otherwise? Who had said otherwise?

The question he had asked remained unanswered; for she had no answer to give him. She sat playing with the nodding grass which she had pulled from around her, breaking it into little bunches, which she unmade as quickly

and threw away;—sat, thinking of nothing in particular, but with a silent wonderment creeping about her, at the newness of the sensation which she had felt at her cousin's question;—sat, with her childish heart slowly unfolding itself from the wrappings of childish innocence, under the remembrance of the warmth of this man's looks and words; and yet before it had any better, stronger mantle prepared to shield itself with from the frosts of life. And in the meanwhile he lay as before, his cigar between his lips, watching her through the wreaths of smoke which intervened between their faces. She knew his eyes were on her, and yet she felt a dread she had never felt before of turning round to meet them. And still Henry Halkett lay and looked at her. He read the child's heart like a book. It was an entertaining book to him. It amused him to watch the first consciousness she experienced of her new feelings; he liked to see her eyes downcast; to feel her hand tremble; to hear her voice stammer and break down under the influence of his smile, his grasp, his words.

He said to himself, that it was quite refreshing only to watch her—so unlike the common run of things—so new a phase of the power of his own influence. He watched the dawning of love in her tender breast; the awakening of that great mysterious shadow—which is still so bitterly real, and, once aroused, so difficult to lull again—with as little concern for what its effects might be upon her, as the analytical experimentalist feels when he puts small animals to the torture to prove the truth of his own theory or supposition.

“It’s getting on for tea-time, Butterfly; we must be going towards home.”

His voice made her jump, and she rose to her feet directly in acquiescence to his proposal. But she walked home by his side very silently—she was still in a dream. The note she had received from him that morning seemed to have grown in its meaning and proportions since he had spoken of it. She wished now that she had not given it up to Miss Parsons; she wanted to see it again—to read it again. When she tried to remember its words even, she could not; it

seemed such a long time since that morning ; as if so much had been done and said since then.

When they reached home, they found old Mrs. Halkett up and dressed, waiting to receive them in the sitting-room. She was very feeble, and never rose, if at all, until late in the day. She was pleased to see her grandson—quietly pleased, not extravagantly so—not as she would have been to see Lucy after an absence. He was the child of her eldest son, a man who, born with small means and large ideas, had found England too expensive a country for him, and had transported himself and family to the Continent, where they had lived now for so many years that they considered themselves naturalized, and looked upon France as their permanent home.

Their eldest son—the Henry I speak of—had been educated to the law, as I have mentioned before, and now lived on his own account in chambers in the Temple. He was the only one of the younger branches of his family that his grandmother had ever seen, and, with the

exception of an occasional visit from her son his father, the only thing she saw of any of them. He was not an especial favourite of hers—his mode of life was unknown to her—but her affection for him met with no reciprocal feeling on his part; and was gradually growing less. But Lucy was the orphan of her youngest and favourite child—her brave, loving sailor-boy—who had been lost at sea only a year after his marriage, and been followed by his young wife a few months afterwards, leaving her baby behind her to its grandmother's care. There were no other children left of her own marriage, Lucy had no near relations except herself and this brood of foreign cousins, whom she had never known. No wonder that her grandmother, while she was indifferent towards Henry Halkett herself, was anxious that he should be the best and closest of friends with his young cousin. If she died—and her life was a very uncertain thing, more so than with most of us—who was to take charge of the orphan girl until she was placed under abler guardianship but himself?

So she received him graciously, and expressed

herself disappointed that he had not made arrangements to stay the night.

“ You seldom come down to spend a few days with us now, Henry. Your room is always ready for you ; you must remember that.”

Lucy had slipped away as soon as they had entered the room. She had run up to her bedroom and bathed her heated face with cold water, in a fashion which would have sent her old nurse into fits, had she witnessed the imprudence. For the first time, she wished, as she smoothed her hair in the glass, that she didn't wear it in such a childish fashion, and that Gran would let her have her next dresses with a long skirt, as women wore them. Yes, she would have them, she was determined. Why, these short things made her look as if she was quite a girl still, instead of the woman she really was. And as Lucy thought the words, she drew her slight figure up with a consciousness of being tall. And a woman she certainly was, if height constitutes one.

When she re-entered the sitting-room, her old grandmother drew her fondly towards her.

"And how do you think this child looking, Henry?" she asked.

"Very well, indeed," he answered; "but Butterfly always looks well." And as he spoke, he tried to pull her down upon his knee.

She had often sat there, but she resisted his efforts this time; and when he persisted in them, she grew scarlet.

"Don't tease her, Henry," her grandmother remarked. "Lucy thinks she is growing too big to be treated like a little child. Don't you, dear?"

The girl sprung to her side as she spoke, and sat down by her knee, burying her face in the folds of her dress. As she did so, the old lady's hand wandered upon her bent head, and rested there lovingly.

She kept her place there most of the evening, and took little part in the conversation between her grandmother and Henry Halkett. Only once, as he was talking fast about some of his gaieties in town, and he mentioned the names of the same ladies two or three times over, did she raise her flushed face to his with an enquiring

glance in it, that was very full of an undefined pain—a pain which yet he saw, and attributed to its true cause—which only made him rattle on still more pertinaciously, on the same topic, as he examined his handsome nails, the while he watched the clouds of distrust and jealousy which gathered over her fair young face.

But when the time came for him to go, she busied herself getting his hat and great-coat for him from the little hall, and in helping to put them on. He had already said “good-night” to his grandmother, with a promise of a speedy return, and now he bent to kiss Lucy. As he did so, he felt something wet upon her cheek : he felt it ; for the passage was dark, and he could not see.

“Butterfly !” he whispered, “what’s that ?” though he knew well enough why the tear had come there.

“Harry !” she said, as he folded his arms about her ; “are they—those ladies you spoke of—are they *very* great friends of yours ?”

“My jealous little Butterfly !” he said, in return, and he kissed the girl’s lips as he spoke,

"mustn't your old Hal have a lady friend even? Naughty child, you shall give me a dozen kisses for having asked the question."

"Oh! no, Harry," murmured the girl in her fluttering delight at his evasive answer, as she suffered him to take what he said she should give, "I wasn't jealous, only I thought——"

"You thought I had more than one Butterfly, eh?" he went on to say for her; "then you were wrong, Lucy."

She stood where he left her in the dark passage, the tears still wet upon her cheek, quivering with delight at his last words. When she went back into the lighted room, her grandmother noticed the change in her.

"Why, my darling, what's come to you? you have been so silent the whole evening, I have been afraid you were not well, and now you look as happy as a bird. You are not glad that your cousin's gone, are you, dear? I thought you liked to have him here now and then."

"So I do, Gran," answered Lucy, as she resumed her former position at the old lady's knee, "but I was a little tired with my walk to-day,

and he's coming back on Saturday. Oh ! dear old Gran," she continued as she threw her arms about her neck, "I do love you so. Let me come and sleep in your bed to-night; I want to feel you close to me whenever I wake. I feel as though if I sleep alone to-night I should cry till it was morning."

CHAPTER XII.

ACCEPTED.

ABOUT a fortnight after the first ride that Isobel Fane took with Rex Reverdon in the Row she was sitting alone in her own room, not only alone but unoccupied—a most unusual thing for her to be. No paper, pens, and ink, backed up by dictionaries, littered the table; her workbox was closed, and her hands were empty. A book indeed lay on her lap, which had evidently slipped from their listless hold, how long before, even she herself, I fancy, was not aware of, and what its contents, she knew as little as we do. She was sitting in her easy chair, her head laid back, her eyes closed, to all appearances deliciously idle; in reality, actively busy, that is so far as heart and brain were concerned.

She had plenty to think of, a great deal had

occurred during that last fortnight ; so much so, that she could scarcely believe so short a time had past since the evening on which Rex Reverdon had brought her the bouquet in that very house. There had been a great many rides taken since that first one in the Row—a great many, that is to say, to take place in fourteen days, eight or ten at the least—and there had been several evenings spent at mutual friends together, and several afternoon calls, prolonged beyond the usual calling hours, and trespassing upon the first dinner-bell ; and there had been more than one delicate attention paid, in the shape of flowers and such-like trifles,—more than one delicate compliment whispered or outspoken. Was it of these things Isobel Fane was thinking, as she lay back in her arm-chair that morning ? Partly of these, which had led her on by degrees to expect a proposal at some future time from the man who uttered or did them, but scarcely to expect it so soon as it had come.

For it had come : Rex Reverdon had proposed to her only the day before. They were riding as usual, but alone. Mr. Peyton, whose

annoyance at his sister-in-law's persistent intimacy with so dangerous an acquaintance for him as Mr. Reverdon appeared to be, had for the last few days (finding his endeavours to prevent her making appointments to ride with him fail) taken refuge in silent displeasure, and refused to accompany her in what he so strongly disapproved of. They had started with the intention of looking in upon Lady Charlotte Huntley at Wimbledon, and were riding in that direction. Their conversation had fallen into a very sober strain : people who talked with Isobel Fane, in her serious moments, generally found that the conversation did, imperceptibly to themselves, rise into the discussion of something better and higher than they had intended it to be at the commencement of their discourse ; and they had been speaking of what true and false happiness consisted of. Rex had been listening, perhaps, more than taking part in the conversation, for he had very soon found, poor fellow, that he had got out of his depth, and that she was speaking of things too high and too holy for him to understand. He listened to her, and he could

admire the soft tone of her conversation, he could recognize the pure principle which breathed through all she uttered. He admired, but nothing more. The severe school by which she evidently tried to live, and thought everyone should try to live, almost frightened him from giving her his own opinion on the subjects she touched upon. But through it all there was such an evident tenderness in her manner towards himself, such an evident trust that if he was not all he ought to be, it was not because he did not wish or strive for it, that it gave him courage to seize the opportunity for speaking to her, when it offered itself. She was trying to define happiness, but she gave up the attempt, laughing:—

“After all,” she said, “what is happiness to one person is not so to another. I am sure it does not consist in outward things; it emanates from our own hearts. I am convinced that earthly happiness—the happiness of this world—lies in people, not places.”

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean, that if you have only people who

love you, and whom you love in return, about you, that it does not signify where you live, or how."

"That is attributing omnipotent power to love, is it not?"

"I think love *is* omnipotent," she answered.

"Do you, Miss Fane?" he asked, bringing his horse nearer to hers as he spoke (they were riding over Putney heath at the time); "would love be sufficiently potent to make you happy with me—as my wife?" he added.

He turned his head for her answer, but her face was hidden from him. She had hoped this might come some day, might even be coming, but not now, not so soon as this; she had not dreamt of so great happiness.

Have you ever watched the sea, outwardly smooth as glass, and yet all its billows heaving as if a living creature were beneath its breast. You will see no foam on such a day, no crested waves falling over one another, and it appears just the moment for a row, or a swim. But just try it. Get into your boat, or, take a header from your machine, and you will con-

fess yourself mistaken. Better to dance on the high billows, or to be carried, in spite of yourself, over their white crests, than to have to stand against that obstinate under-current, either in a boat or without it. It looks clear and calm, but there is untold force beneath.

That is just as her heart felt when she turned away her head and could not answer him. Her breast rose and fell, her breath came short and quick, and the words which rushed into her mind for answer would not be formed; but yet outwardly she looked calm enough. He thought at first she was offended.

“Have I spoken too soon, Miss Fane?” he urged. “If so, you must forgive me. I have wanted to say it for the last week.”

Then she turned her head towards him, her tongue unloosed, and tears in her eyes.

“Oh, no!” she said. “Reginald, you have made me so very happy; only I did not expect you would make up your mind so soon.”

She put her gloved hand in his as she spoke, and he, as in duty bound, kissed it. She was not a young girl, and would not profess to feel

the bashfulness which was incompatible with the years she had mixed with the world: but her cheek was very beautifully bright with pleasure when she turned it towards him, and the look of affection in her eyes was so evident, that Rex's heart smote him to the quick, and he brought out his next sentence very hurriedly.

"Miss Fane, I don't know whether you think I'm a rich man; but I'm not."

"Reginald!" she said, and her tone of voice was a reproach in itself.

"I don't mean," he stammered, "that I think *that* would have influenced your answer just now, only you ought to know it first. I have been an extravagant fellow. I was brought up in extravagant habits, and this last year I have diminished my income considerably; in fact, I've got very little left. It seems to strike me more forcibly than ever just now; it seems so unfair——"

She understood his meaning before it was put into words, and answered him as if it had been.

"There can be no *unfairness* in love," she said. "Reginald, if you love me, and I love

you, it cannot signify which has the money: the one who has it to give is the happiest of the two, that's all."

He was going to say something about thanks, when she turned round quickly upon him.

"But are you *sure* that I *shall* make your happiness? Are you sure that you are in earnest, that you have not deceived yourself?"

The energy of her manner startled him into something of a respondent nature.

"Quite sure, Miss Fane," he answered. "Is not the fact of my asking you sufficient proof of my sincerity?"

"Oh, yes!" she said, remembering his perfections and her many deficiencies, for she had a humble opinion of herself. "Forgive me for having asked the question. If I can make you happy, Reginald, I will, so help me God."

"Thank you," he said, very softly.

Presently he resumed, as he looked at his watch, "Shall we ride on a little, Miss Fane, for it's nearly four o'clock, and if my mother is at home, it will keep us out late."

"Oh, don't let us go to see your mother to-

day," said Isobel, shrinking from the idea of meeting strangers, whilst she was still revelling in the dawn of her lately-acquired knowledge of his love. "Another day, Reginald, but not now ; I'd rather not pay calls to-day."

"Just as you like," he answered. "It is very awkward paying visits in a riding habit. I'll drive you out here in a day or two, if you like, Miss Fane."

Her face rather clouded as he spoke her name, and she was silent for the next few minutes. Then he said :—

"What are you thinking of, Miss Fane?"

"Why do you call me 'Miss Fane?'" she asked.

He coloured up at the question. The fact is, he was scarcely aware he had been doing so, and he felt he had been guilty of a breach of love's etiquette. But for the moment he could scarcely remember what was her Christian name, he had interested himself so little in the matter, and the Peytons generally called her "Bell."

"You know my name, don't you, Reginald," she said next.

“It’s Isabella, isn’t it?” he stammered.

“No,” she answered, but a look of pain passed over her face as she did so. “It’s Isobel.”

“I have always heard Mrs. Peyton call you ‘Bell,’” he replied in excuse.

“Oh!” I cannot bear ‘Bell,’” she said. “I hope you will never call me so, Reginald.”

He had recovered himself a little by this time, and was ready with a salve for her wounded vanity, for it *had* been wounded, and he knew it.

“I will never call you anything but what you wish,” he said, with one of his “long” looks; “but, if you leave it to me, I would rather call you ‘my wife’ than anything else.”

And would she have been a true woman and a loving woman if such words had not had the power to set her again at her ease respecting him?

But still he did not call her “Isobel.” He talked freely to her all the way home, but he studiously avoided her name. It sounded so strange, so unfamiliar to him—so much *too* familiar, if you will allow me to be paradoxical.

He had not dreamt of it, sighed it to himself, written it in conjunction with his own, as most lovers do when their fate is an undecided thing, and they are generally very mad and very disagreeable. He had only thought of her as “Miss Fane,” and “Isobel” appeared like a stranger to him. Once more he tripped as he was about to lift her from her horse, when they arrived at home.

“Now, Miss Fane.”

She did not notice it this time, but she looked at him—a look which made him follow her into the hall and take her hand. The servant had closed the hall door, and walked away again, and they were alone—she standing by the table, as she prepared to put her riding whip into the stand above it.

“When shall I see you? To-morrow, *Isobel*?” he said awkwardly; but oh! how sweet it sounded to her from his lips! She turned her face towards him radiant, and he stooped and kissed her. The action brought both her ungloved hands before her face, to hide her tears.

“When?” he repeated.

“Oh! at any time. Whenever you like. Oh, Reginald, I *am* so happy!”

And so he had left her, with the touch of his lips still fresh upon hers, the sound of his voice speaking her familiar name still in her ears. What wonder that this woman, old enough to be already weary of the world, had lost herself ever since in a delicious dream, from which a night's rest had had no power to rouse her.

As she sat in her easy chair that morning she went over in her mind all the events of the past fortnight, to see if she could retrace the circumstances which had led to the wonderful consummation of yesterday—the incredible certainty that Rex Reverdon loved her; for that he did love her she never doubted. So young as he was, so gloriously handsome, so courted and sought after—that he should have chosen her from among all the fair women of his acquaintance to fill the honoured station of his wife: “his wife,” the wife of that “boy,” that “model,” that type of everything that she had ever conceived of manly beauty and vigour and kindness. She could not credit it, the truth

would not grow familiar to her mind ; she was almost afraid now that it must have been a vivid dream only.

"If you please, Miss, master wants to see you in the study particular."

"Your master ? Why, didn't he go to his chambers this morning as usual ?"

"Oh, yes, Miss ; master's been out and in again, and he and missus is together in the study, and wants you down there directly, Miss."

"What on earth's the matter now ?" thought Isobel, as she went slowly downstairs to her brother-in-law's room ; "more bills, I suppose. Well, they must learn to do without my money soon."

But when she reached the study it didn't look at all like bills. Her brother-in-law was walking up and down the room in his usual style when he was annoyed, and her sister Fanny was lolling in a chair, looking very much frightened at her husband's proceeding, and very much injured by the world in general. As Isobel entered she turned a reproachful, watery glance upon her, and ejaculated—

“Oh, Isobel!”

“Will you be kind enough to hold your tongue, Mrs. Peyton?” said her spouse, stopping short in his mad career as he confronted her, “and allow *me* to speak to your sister.”

Mrs. Peyton’s only answer was the production of her pocket-handkerchief.

“What on earth is the matter?” inquired Isobel, appealing to her brother-in-law.

“Matter?” he answered; “I should think there was matter enough. Take a chair, please.”

His manner was so commanding that she resented it at once.

“No, I don’t wish to take a chair, thank you. If you have anything to say to me, I can hear it standing. What is all this fuss about?”

Mr. Peyton being an excessively fussy little man, if there was one thing above another which had the power to irritate him: it was being recommended not to put himself into a fuss, and I am afraid Isobel knew it.

“This ‘*fuss*,’ as you elegantly express it,” he answered, “is on your account only. Pray did you know, Miss Fane,” he continued, in

a very loud tone of voice, and trying to look very fierce, "that Mr. Reverdon was to send me a letter this morning?"

"No, I did not know it," she replied. "I never thought of it. If I had, I should have thought nothing more likely."

"Oh, you should have thought 'nothing more likely,' should you?" he observed, passing into the strain sarcastic; "then perhaps you know the contents of it, Miss Fane? You know what all your riding and walking appointments with Mr. Reverdon have come to?"

"Yes, I do know," she said, "of course I know. Mr. Reverdon proposed to me yesterday, and I accepted him. Do you wish to learn anything more?"

"Oh, Isobel!" whined her sister from behind her handkerchief.

"*Will* you hold your tongue?" exclaimed her husband, stamping his foot as he spoke; and then returning to Isobel, he said, "You've made a pretty mess of it, Miss Fane. You've put your foot in it."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

“You don’t take my advice,” he said; “you go riding about with young men of no character, and——”

“Take care what you say, Fred,” she interposed.

“But I will *not* take care what I say,” he rejoined; “he is a young man of dissipated character, who has run through every bit of his fortune, and thinks to patch up his own affairs with your money. Perhaps you didn’t know *that*, Miss Fane? I could have told you though. I could have told you what the men of his own set will think of his marrying an heiress—what they will think of you for accepting him—but you didn’t choose to take my advice, or I should not have such a pleasant piece of news to give you to-day.”

“It is no news,” she answered, contemptuously. “I knew it before. Mr. Reverdon is too honourable to leave any *news* relative to himself for *you* to tell me, Mr. Peyton. I conclude your business with me is finished now, and I may go.”

“Do you really intend to marry that man?”

"Really and truly; I have promised him so," she answered.

"Give yourself to a man who only wants you for your money? Why, you're twice his age!"

The last remark brought the blood to her face, but she didn't notice it. She answered only the first part of his speech.

"Wants me for my money? What do *you* want me for—both you and Fanny? Is it for love you wish to retain my presence in your house—for love that you would keep me single all my life? or is it for the sake of those numberless little comforts which my money pays for you?"

She looked the man so straight in the face, that his eyes fell before hers, and then she felt for the moment sorry she had been so plain-spoken.

"I have not been used to mention these things," she went on to say, with an apologetic air. "I have paid for them, Fred, as you know, and been glad to pay for them. They have been for my own sister — my own nephews and

nieces. I would have given twice as much if I had had it. Money has been little use to me in a single state, except as it gave me pleasure to spend it upon others. But what have you given me in return for it? What have I received in this house as equivalent?"

"Oh, Isobel," sobbed her sister, "I am sure you have always had everything comfortable, and a fire in your room, and——"

"Pshaw!" said Isobel Fane, a proud curl of the lip breathing her contempt; "don't speak to me like that, Fanny. You know it is not such things I speak of. I could have been contented with half as much of money as I have had if I had received with it a little more consideration. When have my wishes been thought of—my comfort—my mental comfort, remember, not my bodily—been considered, or ever your own, placed aside to make room for it? Have you made your house so happy a home to me that I should dread to leave it, that I should wish to give up the offered love of an honest man in its exchange? You have placed every obstacle

possible in the way of my so escaping. When poor Harold died——"

"Well, really!" exclaimed Mr. Peyton, "I should think at this present moment, when you are discussing the probability of your marriage to another man, that you might leave Mr. Gray's name alone."

"Why?" she asked. "I am not ashamed of a former love. I am not ashamed that the bitterness of that memory has passed away. I am very thankful to God for it. I am very thankful that He has allowed me to feel another love, a better, stronger love than that, and to feel it for one who has offered his to me in return. If Harold Gray could see me now and hear me, he would say the same. But when he died, when I did not think that loving again was a possibility, when all my future life seemed a blank to me, what sympathy did I get from your hands or even Fanny's? Couldn't I see (or do you think me blind?) that through all your affected condolences and expressions of pity, that you were glad at what set my heart bleeding; that it was a comfortable thought to you

that the grave had closed over what was so dear to me, that even the excess of my first grief at his loss was a comfort, inasmuch as it seemed to promise a single life devoted to his memory? Can you deny it?"

She spoke energetically and rapidly, and in the last question she appealed to both of them, but neither answered. Mrs. Peyton was feebly weeping, while she occasionally murmured something about ingratitude, mixed up with wax candles and every convenience; and her husband was looking over the wireblind into the back yard, his hands beneath his coat-tails, trying to appear unconcerned and at his ease.

"Can you deny it, Fanny?" Isobel then repeated, putting the question direct to Mrs. Peyton, but Mrs. Peyton only wept afresh.

"You cannot, either of you," she continued; "and now that there seems again a chance that my happiness for this life may be secured by marriage, you have first endeavoured to prevent such a consummation by every argument against Mr. Reverdon's character and intentions that you could possibly use, and when it has come,

you turn round upon me like this, and speak as if I was going to make one of the most disreputable marriages possible. I have spoken hotly, Fred,” she added, turning to that gentleman, “but you provoked me; I might have said as much, perhaps, in fewer words, but when one is roused, it is difficult to choose one’s language. I have accepted Mr. Reverdon, and I intend to keep to that acceptance. Henceforth, therefore, I beg that any ideas you may have adopted, relative to his motives for asking me to marry him, you keep to yourself, for I will not stand by quietly and hear them. If my presence in your house, after this understanding between us, becomes unpleasant to you, you must console yourself with the knowledge that it will not be for long, for as I do not anticipate any pleasure from the manner in which you will probably receive Mr. Reverdon here, I shall agree to any time that he may wish to fix for our marriage. Now, I hope, this is the last that I shall hear from you of so unpleasant a subject.”

She left the room as she spoke, and from her outward manner, no one could have told how

much she was annoyed at the interview which had just closed. Mr. and Mrs. Peyton looked at one another in blank amazement as the door shut behind her. They had certainly overshot their mark, if their object was to keep her with them as long as possible, and not one of their arrows seemed to have gone home. He had nothing to say for himself, or of her; he saw he was powerless, and therefore he vented his indignation upon his wife, until something very like a quarrel took place between them, and stopped for the time their discussion of poor Isobel's affairs.

And she—

That shaft of his, about Rex Reverdon only wanting her for her money, had *told* frightfully, though she had not shown it. It would have been too great a triumph for his unmanly nature, had she let him see that he had drawn blood. But she felt its barbed point rankling in the very core of her heart as she found herself in her own room again, free to commune with herself and be still.

“Only for her money,” was it possible? It

was a bitter truth to swallow, if it was truth ; but Isobel's nature was too truthful itself to quite believe it. But even, suppose he did, suppose he had ruined himself, and her money would save him, could she hesitate ? she who would lay down her life for him, who had come to love him, these few courting days, so madly that she would have thought everything she possessed too little to barter for another such fortnight of his love. And to be his wife, to live with him for her lifetime, to have him to herself, no other woman with any right, with any possibility of a right to him ! The thought was too happy, too great to admit of so foul a suspicion even having the power to poison its bliss.

If she had ever doubted for a moment whether this marriage would bring her happiness,—if she had ever hesitated for a moment to enter upon so binding, so sacred an engagement,—her brother-in-law's manner towards her, his manner of speaking of her betrothed husband, would have changed her mind, would have cleared up, and settled her doubts at once.

If the Peytons had spoken kindly and affectionately to her, if they had set their fears before her in a calm and steady light, she *might have* wavered here, she might have stopped to consider if this step would really prove the happiness of her life. I do not say, she *would*, I say she *might*. But they had over-reached themselves. Mrs. Peyton, with her tears; Mr. Peyton, with his blustering show of control, where he possessed none, had disgusted her. She was ready to escape at all hazards from a protection, which was so evidently extended to her only for the benefit which accrued to themselves.

Still, she knew that the absence of herself and her money would be a serious absence for them. They were far from rich, and their family was large, and how they would educate and feed and clothe them, without her help, she hardly knew.

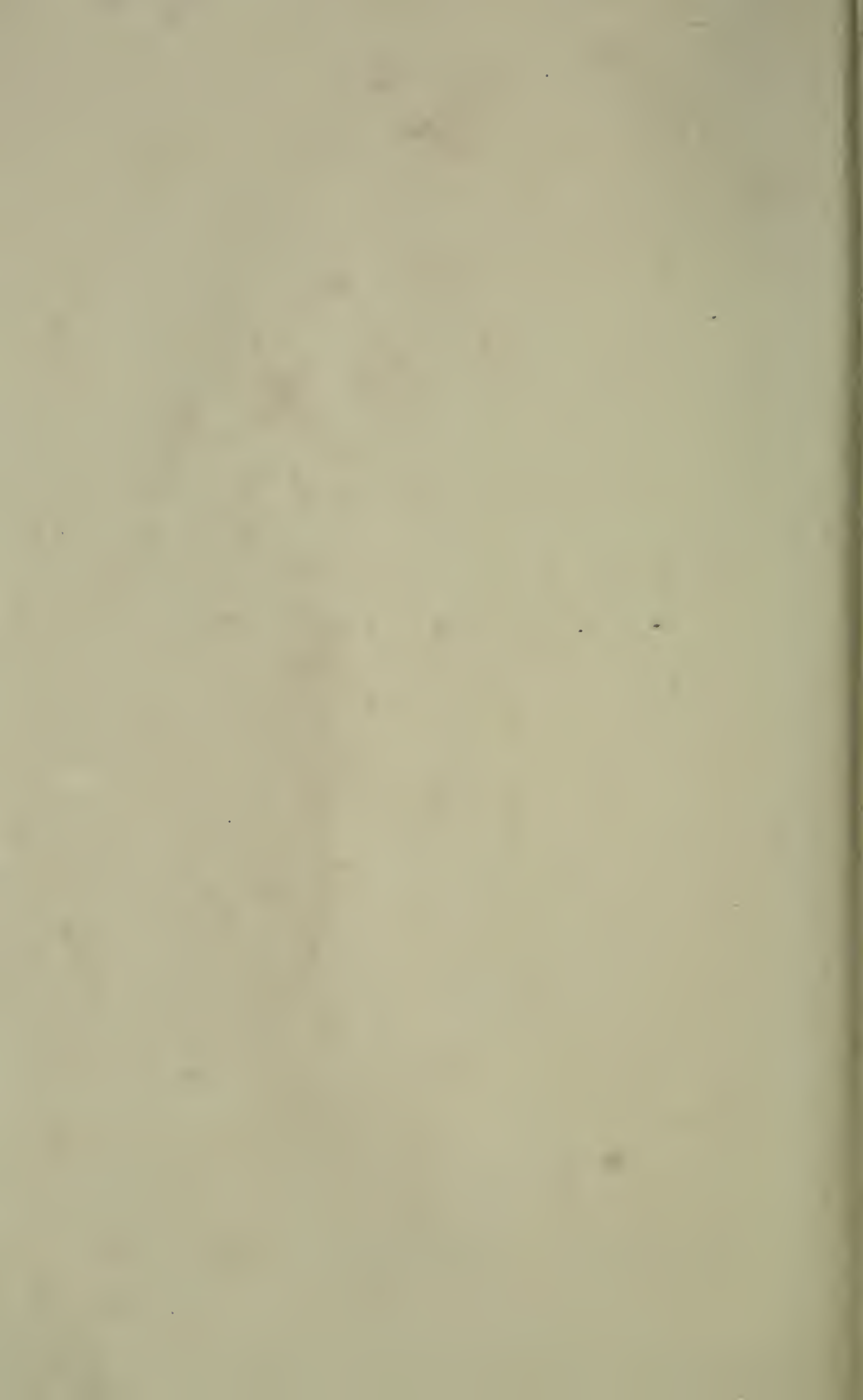
“But I will ask Rex,” she thought to herself, (already her love had taught her to use the shorter and fonder name),—“I will ask him, if I may not still pay for the elder boys’ schooling,

even after we are married. It is not much certainly, sixty pounds a year, but it will be a great help to them, and it is as much as I can—as I *ought*—to give of my husband’s money.”

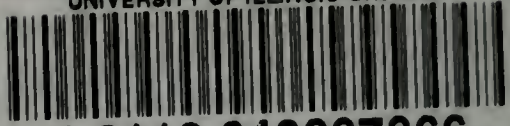
And as the last word left her lips, Isobel’s face relaxed from the stern expression it had worn ever since the interview she had held with her sister and brother-in-law, and she gave herself over to a softening happy dream of what the love of a husband might prove to her.

END OF VOL. I.





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